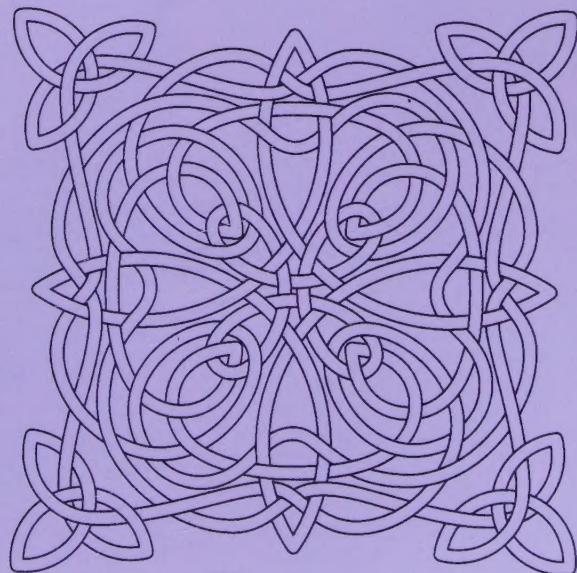


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Lucas Cleeve



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Cleeve, Lucas

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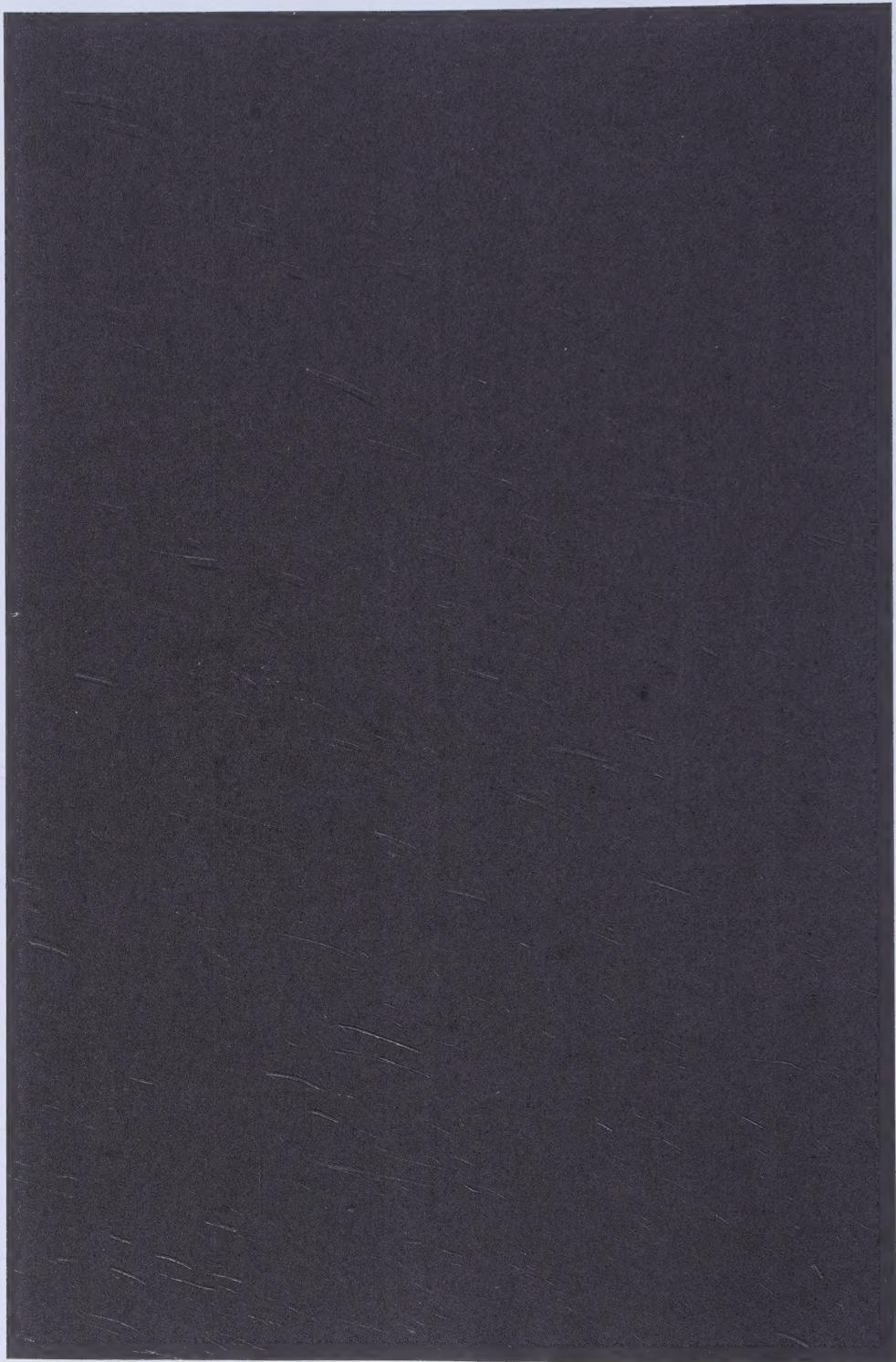
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012628. f. 39.

THE
WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T

A Novel

BY
LUCAS CLEEVE

SECOND EDITION

LONDON
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO.
Limited
1895
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PREFACE.

SOME years ago, in a speech in the House of Commons, Mr. Labouchere exclaimed, “If any one contradicts me, I will contradict him again.” And I must confess that I was possessed with a little of this spirit when I began this work, and so I fancy have been all those who have answered Mr. Grant Allen’s admirable work, the “Woman Who Did.” As someone has said, there is no reason that these answers should ever stop. “The Man Who Did Not,” “The Woman Who Did Not,” and others have followed each other in quick succession, and there is no reason that the “Man Who Did,” and the “Man Who Wouldn’t” should not follow. I cannot, however, help feeling that the subject is exhausted, that the question of

sex has been threshed out, and that no definite conclusions have been come to, and that the public, wearying of the anatomical dissections of human nature that have lately been placed before them, are hankering after the fleshpots of Thackeray and Dickens once more. If, therefore, I venture to weary the public, I must quote Mr. Labouchere's excuse, or liken myself to the woman of the nursery tale who, while drowning and speechless, still moved her fingers in the shape of scissors, that in death she might still protest against her husband's assertion that the string had been cut with a knife.

Mr. Grant Allen's book, in its assertions, is so far above all the contradictions in style, that it is with diffidence that one ventures on Mr. Labouchere's method, but if I so venture to add my quota to the many arguments his book has given rise to, I have a twofold reason. In the first place, I wish to take up the cudgels for Mr. Grant Allen against all those who with bated breath have called his book

“improper.” Mr. Allen in his book does not advocate the absence of the marriage service; he, on the contrary, illustrates the miseries that ensue from any divergence from the orthodox path mapped out by God and man, and surely the punishment of the heroine through her child was greater than she could bear.

My second reason takes the form of an appeal to all those who have daughters. The age of ignorance (mislabeled innocence) is over, and it behoves those who can influence our women to influence them rightly, and to give them some good reason for marriage. The spirit of maternity, doctors tell us, is dying out. Marriage is merely a profession, and women care less for men than they did, while more lax in their morals. The revolt of women is beginning to ruin men’s lives, and all I can say is that when women cease to care for men and for children, God help the men!

If my poor efforts succeed in affording a few moments of interest to the reading

world ; if one young girl is kept from a loveless, mistaken marriage ; if one frivolous nature is checked in her career of flirtation by the remembrance of Lady Morris, I shall perhaps be forgiven by the public for raising my feeble voice in answer to the "Woman Who Did."

LUCAS CLEEVE.

PREFACE to the SECOND EDITION

As a rule one treats with contempt all criticisms that are adverse to one, but in this particular case I feel that it behoves me to take some slight notice of the exaggerated and narrow-minded, not to say uncultivated and badly expressed, reviews of my book in some of the inferior newspapers, criticisms which amount almost to libel, and this for two reasons. In the first place I desire to thank these critics for so kindly advertising my book, with the result that in less than three weeks from publication the whole of the edition is exhausted, and the second is being printed as rapidly as possible to meet the demand (for the credit of England's reading population let us hope that there would not be such a run on an indecent book !) ; and secondly, I feel that I must vindicate the most unwarrantable and outrageous attack on Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., in the *St. James's Gazette*, for Messrs. Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., as clear-headed, sensible men of the world,

would not have lent themselves to the publication of anything unworthy of the British public.

If the question of marriage and the relations between husband and wife are indecent, then my book has indeed hit the right nail on the head, and as "*Il n'y'a que la vérité qui blesse*," I am left to imagine that the critic of the "*Woman who Wouldn't*" is probably the "*Man who Couldn't*" lead the life Opalia desired, and I can only say that the greatest praise of my book I could possibly have received is the certainty of the spirit of bitter animosity it has aroused in *men*. I expected this, and rejoice at the realization of my expectations, and it is now with renewed zeal, and with far less diffidence, that I offer the fresh edition to the public, feeling sure that if the book had one line of immorality or indecency in it, the dear, pure-minded, Sunday-loving, cleanly British public would not clamour for it as they are doing now.

LUCAS CLEEVE.



THE WOMAN WHO WOULDN'T.

CHAPTER I.

BEACH and cliff and sea were only each different shades of the same hue ; here and there a lingering reflection of departed sunset touched the cliffs, making the rest look still more uniform and sad. The cliffs and the sea and the sand were grey as evening descended, the sea breeze was rising, and the waves curled more fiercely and foamed more, as if to frighten away any lingering stroller before night came, and every time the waves went a little nearer

the cliffs and left their wet kisses on the sand a little higher than before. It was chilly even for a spring evening.

It was that mystic hour between tea and dinner, an hour so pregnant with great results, when the plotting parent sends her daughter out for a short stroll, in the hope that the decisive moment will come, the hour the fond maiden either dreads or longs for, when her lover invokes the growing darkness to hide the ardour of his suit, or the shame and agony of his disappointment ; but to Opalia Woodgate and Alan D'Arcy it was only an hour they had both anticipated, an hour for which each was prepared, and when both sought by tacit consent the scenery and the colouring that would best harmonize with their mood, and the words each knew the other had to say. What they had to say was not the result of any mercenary or worldly con-

sideration, nor the result of parental coercion. It was only the result of a six weeks' sojourn under the same roof of two young people with some similarity of taste, or enough liking for each other not to notice the dissimilarities, enough youth to enjoy the present, enough brains and culture to interest each other. They were both passing through that now almost universal phase of dissection of feelings and thought. Sometimes their dissections were original, but sometimes they were borrowed dissections which they had read and used as if their own, really forgetting that they were other people's, because they suited them so well, because they expressed what they had long wished to say. They had both come to the conclusion of what life ought to be, as a great many of us have, but unfortunately you cannot seize life by the collar and push it in front of

you as you would an unwilling schoolboy on the road to school.

Just when you think you have settled life, and thought, and action into one groove, life's realities come like a sudden gust of wind and carry off, metaphorically speaking, the hat of all your illusions and plans and theories, and blow your hair about, and ruffle your appearance and your feelings, and upset your ideas, and it is long before you settle yourself again. The man or woman who worships the "Eternal Beautiful" has just arranged his or her yellow roses in a copper bowl, and placed lilies at the feet of the Della Robia Madonna, and scattered "white lilac" on the air, when from the open window come wafted gusts of garlic and onion from his neighbour's kitchen, and looking out to find out whence this unholy odour that thus desecrates the abode of Beauty, his

eye alights on a dead cat rotting in the street, or a costermonger hitting a drunken wife over the head, and all his dreams are disturbed.

Thus he is happiest who makes no plan for life, but contemplates with reverence the surprises and revelations life brings him.

One surprise and revelation, the greatest, the most beautiful to Alan D'Arcy was Opalia Woodgate. She was like the heroine of every novel put together, for her hair was neither black nor gold, but more like brown-tinted leaves held against the setting sun. Her eyes were neither blue nor grey, violet nor hazel, but like the corner of a stream where violets and forget-me-nots grow, and her cheeks were like a peach that has hung too long on a southern wall, and her strong, straight limbs were like those of a goddess, and from her eyes and

hair and mouth there arose a fragrance of youth and health that was like the incense of the beauty that Eros loved, and her gesture and gait, her whole being expressed "Hope," undying energy, earnestness and delight. If ever there was a goddess of "Expectation," she was such an one as Opalia.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," is what Alan thought and longed a hundred times a day to say—and she, too, longed to hear—longed, yet dreaded, for the pain she knew it would bring him. Would it be the beginning of the end? Had he understood all she had endeavoured to convey in her maidenly, modest way, or would she have to ask her mother to say it? No, she could not entrust her dear old common-place mother to say the things she wished to say. She could not trust her mother to say it as she meant it. She

had tried to discuss it with her mother once, but it was a hopeless task, her mother had seemed shocked, and had said,—

“In my day girls knew nothing of these things, still less spoke of them.”

“What is the use of quoting ‘your day,’ dear mother, when things are quite altered now? I have been to Girton, and there we had a lecture and a meeting once a term on ‘The Relations of the Sexes,’ and I was president, dear mother. It is not the knowing, dear mother, it is the not knowing that is the suicide of women’s happiness, it is the not acting on that knowledge. It is everyone knowing but yourself that is the mischief.”

But to poor, dear Mrs. Woodgate these ideas were dreadful. She worshipped and admired Opalia, but with a sort of wonder as a hen who has hatched, not a duckling,

but a beautiful proud peacock, with green and gold eyes, that has no similarity with her, and yet that she is proud of having brought forth.

“You are an extraordinary girl,” her mother and a thousand others would say over and over again, but Opalia would say, with earnestness, “What is the good of feeling as I do if I do not carry it out?”

“You will be wretched,” someone had said. “Then I must be wretched, there is no salvation without crucifixion. We all shrink from open martyrdom, and our silent private ones do no good to women as a body. I am ready to sacrifice myself, if sacrifice it is. Real love will be ready to sacrifice itself to my whim.”

Many years afterwards she told her husband what it was had given her these thoughts. It was not the Girton teaching,

but a conversation she had overheard without her wishing it between her brother and a man cousin the day of a wedding. Opalia had been bridesmaid. Oh, how miserable she felt to be a woman at all. How she had crept to her room with tingling, flaming cheeks, to think that during that day and night that was what people thought about. The clergy, the verger, the guests, all knew the ordeal that was to come. Oh, to think that the end of their prayers in God's House, the lovely music, the lovely flowers, the pure white robes, the lovely faces of the bridesmaids, all that was sweetest and purest was to end thus. And all the world knew it. Surely if such things must needs be, "if man's and woman's fidelity" must needs have other than the ties of love—(for, after all, what is the marriage service but the anticipation of the change of love? It seems to say,

“Ah! you love him or her now, but you may change, and we must bind you so that even if your heart changes, you must still feed and clothe this woman ; even if your heart changes, you must still obey this man !” And a service which gave scope to such possibilities marred perfect love, just as the binding down of duties makes the precious offering of love of no value. If the heart changed, who would care for the outward show of it ?) Then why call together all your friends to tell them ?

There were many other thoughts that sprang out of these thoughts. Was it necessary that the desire for the companionship and love of a man should end thus ? Surely all the poetry of lovers ended thus ? She thought of companions of her own who had married, and whom she had met again. How commonplace their relations had grown ; how utterly different were the

conjugal pecks to the loving kisses of the past; how the daily and nightly companionship had put an end to all the modest maidenly ways of her former companion. Surely a woman was still a woman. What was the good of educating a girl to purity and modesty, if in one night that education was negatived? "Surely this familiarity was the death of love!"

Later came other thoughts, all springing from the one idea, as the white clematis throws out branch after branch of its white bloom till the original stem is hardly seen, grasping on to chink and stone and window-lattice, enveloping everything with its rich fragrance.

The man was half a woman, and the woman was almost man when they met. Surely both born of a woman must needs be alike. The very rivalry lay in its similarity.

Then he told her, with all the passionate

words that cultivation and civilization have put into the mouth of man, the story of his love, how she represented love to him and life, how she alone was the very woman who could ever be his ideal. The sea grew quite angry and jealous then; and the sea ever after filled Opalia with strange feelings, for what is romance but the poetry of association ?

Then, with her head on his breast to hide her blushes, she told him what she would do, what she would be. He smiled, amused.

“ You do not know what you are asking,” he said. “ There is no love without passion ; you, yourself, would not have it so. What can you know of these things ? ” He did not consent yet to her terms.

Then, pulling him gently to her side, she said,—

“Sit by my side and listen before you deride, just try and put aside all the customs and prejudices of your youth and bringing up. Try and realize that a great revolution has taken place, ‘the revolt of woman,’ not against man, but against two thousand years of hypocrisy and ignorance. The ignorance far less than the hypocrisy. For years girls have known these things, unless they married at sixteen.”

“What things?” asked Alan, still doubtful, still hesitating.

“Do not press me too hard,” she said, laying her head on his heart again; then she murmured, “What marriage means.”

It was so unexpected, so unnecessary, he thought, but he belonged to the new school. It was a phase to go through.

“Well, darling, it means love.”

“No, not exactly,” said the girl. “It means the woman giving up everything in

the world, and the man swearing he is her slave when he is about to become her master."

"No, my sweet, that depends ; it is the one moment when a woman rules man's destiny and can do with him as she likes."

"Do you mean that, Alan ?"

"Darling, I am your absolute slave ; do with me what you will."

"Then, dear one, if that is so, would you be content if I were your sister only ?"

"Certainly not !" said Alan. It was growing almost dark, and Opalia's two eyes glowed like two beacons on a distant hill.

"Ah ! there it is," she said.

"Do you mean that you won't marry me ?" he said.

"I will marry you in church," she said, "but that is all. Do not make it too difficult for me to explain."

“ Speak, little one,” he said; “ explain, and whatever is said to-night shall be buried by the sea; none shall know, none shall remember,” for her short, halting speech was beginning to enlighten him.

With tears in her eyes and pressing his fingers almost to pain, she spoke, and her words were worse, though she knew it not, than her bridal night need have been to her. The darkness alone made it possible to say.

“ Listen, dear,” she said ; “ years ago girls did not know what marriage meant ; they knew, indeed, of a terrible sacrifice, but it was all closed. No one told them, no one helped them ; it was like death that one meets alone. They were helped to the very door of the church, to the very steps of the altar—but after that. Oh ! Alan, if you knew the things girls have told me ! ”

"Curse them," said Alan between his teeth, but aloud he said,—

"But they did not love each other, darling, as we do."

"I don't know," she said thoughtfully, "I should like time to find out."

"To find out if you love me?"

"No, I cannot tell what; but, dear one, there is so much in life, and one sees so much of how people change and how they look back on life, and say, 'Oh, had I acted differently.' That has always seemed to me because they rushed into events."

"Then you would like time to think, dear, and yet you seem to love me, and I—" he stooped down and kissed her two knees passionately, yet reverently, but did not finish his phrase.

"Darling, listen," she said, but her voice was less steady after his kiss. "I have been trying to study the problems of life;

they are very difficult, but everywhere I have seen that people failed because they had no principles, no scheme of life laid down. They were all theories and no practice—their life being a living contradiction to their words and writings. No one will ever sacrifice themselves, because they know that others will not, and so, with the excuse that their small sacrifice would do no good, they too give themselves up to the same ways. I read a book once," she went on, "in which the heroine would not go through the form of marriage in church for fear she should lose her liberty; yet every action of her life showed that her liberty had gone, whether she defied the conventional laws of society or not. Her life was an utter failure."

"And yet you would do the same."

"No, no, Alan; her life was a failure, because it was defiance, not sacrifice. She

was simply following her impulses, and indulging in them."

"And you follow yours, darling," said her lover impetuously, and laughing. "Don't weary yourself with so much self-analysis and analysis of life ; you are placed in this world to enjoy yourself and to be happy, to take what the gods have given you in the shape of a charming, good-looking young husband, with great ability, to say the least ; now be thankful and don't let some foolish ideas mar our future happiness."

By this time there was darkness everywhere, only a glow over sand and sea like the eye of Providence shining dimly. She laughed at his description of himself, then her voice changed.

"No, darling," she said, "those are my principles. I must abide by them. Mine must be the tiny sacrifice that is of so little

avail, but which is needed to build up the future. I can only marry you, darling, in church, and afterwards be a true, loving sister to you, and be with you always in health and in sickness, in life and in death."

The disappointment was terrible to him, and in his grief and rage he said, "Then you do not love me." She stood up and felt that all was over. She stood dark and still against the sky, and something in the man's heart raged and roared like the waves that were coming in more fiercely now and reaching almost to their feet.

"I love you," she murmured, "better than life, better than happiness ; but I must be true to my principles. Love and passion must have no part in each other. The blessing of God is not for human gratification, but for the union of man and woman for the purposes of greatness and perfection.

The Church cannot make holy what would otherwise be unholy."

He was silent, a wild despair was coupled with the impossibility of arguing. It all seemed so true when she said it; he had a horrible shameful feeling that now that she had offered love which he had pretended was all he coveted, it was no good to him. It revealed to him what his thoughts had been since he had met this beautiful woman, only a longing for possession unacknowledged to himself. She offered what was supposed to be the most beautiful thing, "Love," and it was like Dead Sea fruit to him. And she! Tears of blood seemed to flow to and from the back of her throat to her heart, and then upwards, but none came to her eyes. She had feared and dreaded this moment, but the possibility of his not accepting her terms had never occurred to her. She thought from her

conversations with him that this was the one man who would unite with her to establish her principles and to help her. They had had such long talks, and he had so seemed to acquiesce. She had still to learn that when a man listens to a woman he loves expounding her theories, it is only because he enjoys the sound of her voice, not because he either agrees with her or that her words bring conviction. It is the mere conclusion come to that because she is so sweet all that she says must be sweet too, as one stoops to smell the fragrance of a lovely rose; but she in her ignorance had imagined that his heart beat with hers, and when its single throb beat without hers, it caused a pain which was like death. All her hopes, her sweet dreams, her ambitions, the great plans which she had evoked in the night, the sweet aspirations, the companionship,

the very thoughts of passion which would come, though unbidden. All was night in her heart, dark as the night that was floating down, and her teeth chattered, half with cold, half with misery.

“Let us go,” and her voice sounded as if she said, “Let us each go on our way forth into the world.” If Alan failed, all men would fail; Alan had been nearer in ideas to her than anything she had ever read or anyone she had ever spoken to; and many men had made love to her; and if Alan failed, then all, indeed, was lost. Yet the idea of ever swerving from her principles never occurred to her. And he; he stood with his hand to his head, searching for some argument, yet all he said was,—

“This cannot be the end.” He could find no other words; then, man-like, he took her in his arms and whispered what

to him seemed the one appeal left to a woman's heart—but that too is dying out.

“What about little children, Opalia—do you want no little children?”

She thanked the darkness that hid the hot wave that came to her brow. The emotion made her almost angry with him. Why did he try her so hard? for she loved little children; that, too, must be thought of, the responsibility. How dare people create a living soul that may be cursed or saved, that must suffer and live, and think and feel, without first hesitating. That, too, is too great, too beautiful, to be the result of passion. The purest, tenderest, most thoughtful love should create a being for God's will and purposes.

“Even that, Alan”

“Ah, you break my heart, Opalia,” he said; “you break the heart that was so

happy this morning. Oh, little one, let us go back to yesterday ; let us put off this marriage."

For once she wavered ; to go back to be as yesterday, to live yet a little longer in that warm delirious dream, and to put off the marriage. But that would be treachery. To-morrow and the next day and the next, whensoever the moment came, she would be the same.

"We could not go back," she said.

In the distance they saw the figure of the servant, who had been sent to meet them, and struggling against the breeze, they walked back and up the chine silently. When they reached the foot of the garden he stopped.

"Tell me, darling, that it is not true. One day, perhaps—"

For very sickness of heart she wavered.

"One day, perhaps," she murmured ; but

it was said doubtfully, yet it gave him hope. But later, when in her little room, she felt that her wavering was insincerity, the result of physical and moral weariness. She took out a sheet of paper and wrote:—

“DARLING,—I misled you when I said ‘one day, perhaps.’ The very words were treachery to my principles—to the aims of my life. I love you dearly, tenderly, but I can be nothing more to you than a sister. If that ‘one day, perhaps’ were to come, I should despise myself and you. If I married you, and you took advantage of one moment of weakness—for the moment would come—I know I should leave you for ever. I feel brutal as I write this. Oh! Alan, forgive me if I pain you, if I mislead you. We have misled each other. I thought you and I agreed. Forgive me, and believe, darling,

now and always, that I love you as I can never love again.

“OPALIA.”

Noiselessly she left her room, and walked along the passage to his door ; quietly she slipped the letter under his bedroom door for fear it should wake him, and he should read it to-night; for she knew that the “one day, perhaps” had comforted him and revived his hopes. Then she returned to her room, and throwing herself on the bed, wept till she fell asleep, all dressed. Happiness is for none. Those that would welcome it, it passes by. Those at whose door it knocks, do not raise the latch, or push it away from the threshold. There must be a great store of happiness waiting somewhere “to be called for.”

CHAPTER II.

IF for one moment Alan had doubted that she loved him, during his restless night, or when he read her letter in the morning, those thoughts were dispelled when he saw her face.

It was as if the waves had rolled up from the beach and dashed on it all night. The day before she had been a bright, blooming maiden. To-day she was a woman who had bidden farewell to love and happiness. His heart was wrung with grief for her. But if she was sincere, he was truth itself. He could not agree, he could not in all the passionate vigour of his manhood promise what she asked. He

would not lie to her. One day he felt sure one or the other would give in ; he wished it would be himself, but he thought it more likely that it would be her.

When the fly rolled out of the garden gate, Mrs. Woodgate turned to her daughter,—

“ Why is it all at an end between you ? ” she asked.

“ Because we could not agree.”

“ Of course he would not, no man would. And you are a fool, Opalia ; you will destroy your own happiness and mine too,” she added, with a tear or two.

“ Oh, mother, don’t ; I can’t stand it,” said Opalia, with tears in her voice.

She never was nearer giving in than at that moment. For one instant she would have bartered life and death, heaven and hell, for one look at him. Her very soul rushed out in a passionate longing to call

him back. Later on, a sort of dull pride and anger took the place of this grief. If he was not content with her love, her companionship, as she was with his, why should she pine for him ?

In vain her mother and her friends pleaded that men were not the same as women ; that to expect what she expected was to build up endless unhappiness for herself, and to place him in terrible temptation. She agreed that if this were so, then she would remain as she was. The man she sought for took all this as a proof of the glory of his manhood, the grandeur of his purpose. To others might belong passion and the love of children and of family, but she had seen it with other eyes. She had put her hand to the plough, and to look back was unworthy. If needs be, she must work the plough alone, but to give in for the love of one man was to be weak,

and a deserter to her own cause ; it would be to contradict by her action all that she had purposed to do, all that she had asserted.

Now and then she received a letter from him. " I am still waiting," he said, " in the hope of being able to follow you in the beauty of your thoughts and wishes—or I am hoping that you will one day realize that the demands of love are instituted by God, and that there is no degradation in them. I am still hoping that your heart will govern your head at last. I am still, as always, yours and yours only."

Once he wrote :

" As the days go by I long for you more, and yet to do what you wish becomes more difficult. Have you realized whether the man who would agree to this would be the man that would suit you ? You have done me the honour to own that you care for me.

The very fact has made me interesting in my own eyes, has puffed me up with pride ; for to find favour in your sight one must have one redeeming point, magnified perhaps by your own great mind, that raises others to its standard. Forgive this conceit, dear one, and take it as an indirect tribute to your own discrimination." Then, ending playfully, he added, "I think a High Church curate might do as you wish."

"Wicked boy," she said, as she read his letter, for her horror were curates, and she detested the clergy, with one or two exceptions.

Once he wrote in bitterness of spirit, "Why did we ever meet ? As an artist it is more difficult for me than for any one else to fall in with your views, for I worship beauty more than other men. Yet I love you so that I could say with Agrippa, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a

Christian.'" Then came a passionate appeal, in which he pictured all that he desired, in which he implored her to take pity on him.

For some hours after this appeal she was unnerved, and almost unfaithful to the tenets of her creed.

"I must go to him! I must go to him!" she cried out. "Two hearts are breaking for an idea." Then her eyes fell on the motto that hung over the chimney-piece. It was the motto she had chosen for her life, "Entrer maintenir perseverer." Then she wrote:—

"DARLING,—It can never be as you wish.
It must all come to an end.

"Good-bye,

"OPALIA."

And a telegram came,—
"Very well.—ALAN."

That was the end of her engagement. Driving through London once she had met him ; the hansoms had passed each other, but he had made no attempt to stop. He raised his hat with the deepest respect. He turned a shade paler and passed out of sight.

That was indeed the end.

The mind is a wonderful thing, for it goes on educating itself. People call it experience—knowledge of the world ; by a hundred names is called this education of the mind, the forming of the soul, a work which is done by the Creator. It is wonderful how the mind turns into different paths, to seek solace and consolation. Opalia's was not actually a religious mind. Religion was her form of sensuality. The morning service did not appeal to her. She needed romance even in religion ; and the evening service with many lights

and sweet soft music was all she had of it. Her fight against passion was an obstinate protest against the frailty of men and women, the result of deep-rooted modesty coupled with a spirit strongly imbued with the sentiments of the century. There are in all ages people who represent the spirit of the age. There are women who instinctively are ahead in the fashions of the day, who read the books that come out, who keep pace with the times. Opalia was one of these, and her Girton education had opened to her all the new side-lights of thought. Her father had been a great professor, and her mother a sensible woman, and somehow she threw back to some past ancestor and a romantic grandmother the mother of the professor. All this and much reading were the vaccine with which she was inoculated. She was not for the emancipation of women through

the agency of men, but for their banding together to resist certain encroachments which had been instituted by men. She was instinctively an "epicure," and had she not seen in her friends the horrible unpoetic results of satiated passion, she would probably not have inveighed against it so strongly. Probably apart from the strength of her principles was an inborn, unconfessed, unrealized conviction that the dawn of love and passion was the most sublime moment in life, and that that dawn perpetually maintained would make love always perfect. She would have been no woman had she not felt a glow of pleasure at the thought of Alan's love, and to her credit be it said that she pretended no horror when others spoke differently. She only saw that for herself such a code was laid down and she must obey it. Then as needs must be that she must, like a plant

torn away from a support it has long clung to stretches forth to another at once, turn elsewhere, so Opalia's mind, which lately had dwelt on Alan alone, turned for its comfort's sake to work. She must work, do something, go forth to drown her thoughts, to see the world, and solve the problem of life. She longed for advice, but her case was one which none could heal, for none understood. That is one of the sins of humanity ; it makes no effort to, it does not learn the art of, healing its neighbour's wounds. She wrote to a clergyman in the East End.

“ Give me a parish,” she said, “ where there is most misery.”

Meanwhile Alan was taking up again his artist's career, with its charming Bohemianism and its hard work that saves it from immorality.

Sometimes the memory of Opalia and

those six weeks of pure joy, the memory of that perfect woman came across him, but the memory was too holy to have left a deep impression. It was like the memory of a beautiful hymn in church, or a lovely rainbow or sunset, a moment that had brought out his best instincts, that left no remorse behind ; but it was not a remembrance seared into his soul with a hot iron. If he had met her his love would have survived, but he could not have met her without a hot wave of shame at the life he had led since she had refused him. Unfortunately, circumstances and surroundings have far more power than memories. There is no more exquisite description of faith than "the evidence of things unseen." He loves most truly whose memory is most tenacious, who can sustain love when absent. The artistic mind is not tenacious.

What Opalia had fully realized was that women erred in trying to copy men instead of striking out a path of their own. They did it perhaps in self-defence, and that woman was a better companion now than formerly to man was without doubt, but their individuality was lost in their imitations. A copy has always less value than an original. She also realized that women had the clinging instinct. In plants there are the creeping, clinging things like the clematis and the jessamine, and there are the lilies that stand alone, gazing up to heaven in stately loneliness. Opalia was a woman to the core.

Once she had said to Alan,—

“ Which is the French novel in which a woman says, ‘ Aujourd’hui j’ai besoin d’un bras ? ’ I so often feel it, ‘ There is such a need in all humanity for a friend.’ The

greatest good fortune in life is a friend who understands the meaning of the word friendship. As a rule everyone's a friend so far. One is a friend till you borrow money, another is a friend till you cross his path in love or good fortune, another is a friend while you are happy and prosperous. Who is it who said, 'I like my friends to be rich and prosperous' ?"

Acquaintances, who has not hundreds of these? Who has a friend? Who has a friend who will stand like a wall by the sea and let the waves dash against him? who will withstand? who will stick by you whenever disgrace visits you? Yet that is friendship! "He died for our sins." That was the complete perfection of friendship, the sacrifice for shame, for ill-success, for sin, for failure.

Friendship, eternal, undying friendship, that was Opalia's ideal of love when Alan

deserted her. She would say in her livelier moods, "I will advertise in the *Times*, 'Wanted, a Friend.'" Yet Opalia was not sad, for she knew that Alan's love was all hers, if she would be as other women.

Was the question of sex to rule all actions in the world? Was everything to succeed that men undertook between themselves? Was everything to be a grinning pantomime when women were mixed up in it? Could no woman hold a man's friendship by head alone? It seemed to her that clever women only held men in their grasp because their self-surrender was a greater triumph to man than that of the brainless woman. A senseless woman had no charm; a womanly woman no individuality. She believed that the brainless woman had the best time, but she could not bring herself to descend to her level.

Part of her creed was that one of the mistakes of humanity is to expect to be happy ; that should be stamped out of the human idea as cholera had been stamped out of England. When humanity didn't expect happiness, then life would be full of pleasant surprises, and there would be no disappointment. But all her girlhood cried out against her theory. She, too, longed to be happy. The letter killeth ! Oh that there were no letter ! As Opalia grew more accustomed to nursing and looking after the poor, she could not but wonder at the plasticity of the mind. How it would enter into trivial woes, how it would bend and wave, how it could sympathize. All that was mechanical. She found herself entering into all the woes of her poor people. Mrs. Jones's eleventh baby, and the impossibility of paying the rent ; all these things became a part of her

life. She slaved for them. She touched each wound with a healing hand. She spoke almost in their own homely language to the poor. She found herself wrangling over the price of tea and shrimps for their dear sakes. Yet when she reached her rooms at night she felt that the whole essence of her being—carnal, spiritual, and mental—was to be translated into Alan, Alan, Alan.

It was acting, perfect acting, the very personification of sympathy that went to the bedsides of the poor. She read with them, she prayed with them, she spoke to them of patience and of Jesus. But all her soul was crying out against that one sacrifice demanded of her. Oh, if some wonderful third way out could be discovered—neither love nor passion—would she not seize hold of it? Could it be that they were never to blend? Was she to

lose love because she would have nought to do with passion?

Once a great moment of weakness had come, and she had written,—“Darling, I must give in rather than lose you.” But in the morning she had torn it up.

Then came the fiercest temptation of all “Was she driving him to the bad?” Was not married life with him better than the life which rumour said he was leading? Was she called upon to sacrifice her principles rather than lose him? But when she realized how sweet the certainty of this duty would be, she also realized that there was her temptation. Her greatest safeguard, her greatest curse, perhaps, lay in her power of analyzing herself. All the trouble in life comes from shrinking from facing one's own thoughts, one's own capabilities, from realizing one's own power. When women began to know themselves,

their position with men would be different. Men realized their power from childhood. The question that vexed her now was, "Whether woman's mission was to sacrifice herself to man, so that man should realize the beauty of woman's sacrifice? Whether men were taught anything by woman's love?" But her power of analysis came to her rescue once more. She felt that this thought was engendered by the wish to unite sacrifice, duty, and the fulfilment of her wishes. She was more firmly convinced every day that without sacrifice no good was attained, that the instinct of perfection, the thought of an ideal future could alone save the world from falling hopelessly into immorality, selfishness, and ultimate damnation, towards which it was drifting. She saw the deteriorating influence that marriage had on her friends. For some months, perhaps, the good resolutions

taken at the opening of a new life kept the life pure, the attempt to please husband and make home bright gave a saving atmosphere to the surroundings. But it was unnatural. Unnatural that a woman should have a feast of love, an orgie of passion for a few months, and then return to her normal condition of humdrum life. If passion could not exist for ever, if it could change almost to indifference, then it was clearly better if it never existed. She had seen her friends thus plunged into a lethe of happiness, coming out of it still longing for passion and finding it not where they had expected it, where they had a right to expect it, expecting it from others, never satisfied until other men were at their feet, not because they cared for these men nor liked their husbands less, but because the craving for passion having been once stirred was not easily satisfied,

and could not submit to indifference. With women it is love that they love, not the lover or the husband, but to love, and better still, to be loved.

It is better to reach conclusions through a series of experiences than to foresee results from an untried pinnacle. Opalia had grasped life in one comprehensive grasp. She saw the results of passion without having experienced it. Those women are happiest who enjoy it, even if its evanescent effervescence strikes them one day, but to see its results without having experienced it is to feel sick before instead of after a good dinner. The disillusion must come, but premature disillusion is like a still-born child. Perhaps the greatest of Opalia's trials was a feeling tugging at her heart-strings, of fear lest she should lose Alan ; there was something inexplicably terrible in the fact of his

silence, the being no more interwoven with his life and his daily doings. Yet the very fact of the reason that parted them caused a revulsion in her brain, a nausea of her soul. Passions and the relations of the sexes can bear no analysis, and the age of analysis is destroying the age of passion.

The district the Rev. Arthur Kerr had given Opalia was not one likely to influence her in Alan's favour. Everywhere passion and its results were exhibited in the most horrible form ; perhaps nothing was so revolting to Opalia as Mrs. Kerr herself, a pale wan little woman, expecting her eleventh baby, while the Rev. Arthur Kerr preached sermons on purity on Sunday evenings to congregations of celibate young men.

“ Oh ! what was meant, what was God's intention ? ” How often one asks oneself

this, and Opalia always thought of the answer.

“To some it is given, but to some it is not given.” Surely to her it was given, and she must live up to her gift. She plunged herself into her work. She held meetings for young women (to which men came too, sometimes), at which she spoke of the theories of her life, and every time she realized more and more that it was another self carried away by the hysteria of public enthusiasm that preached these words. Yet every meeting made it more difficult for her to go back. Sometimes she heard them discussing her words as she hurried out of the building. Once she heard a woman say, “It’s beautiful what she says for them as can live up to it.” “’Ad the chuck from ‘er young man, I should say,” said the man addressed.

Oh! it was all so hopeless, her little grain

of salt was so small, would it season the earth? Was that not what the world would say? "A sour, disappointed woman," that is what the world would say. A woman who had had all presented to her and refused the cup of happiness for a chimera. Then sometimes anger filled her to the brim. What more degrading to any woman than to know that she had lost his love because she would not pander to his passion, love alone could not bind him? And a woman could be so true. If a man had singled her out—such a man as Alan—had said that all he asked for was love, how eagerly would she have laid her hand in his and followed him.

"Is that so? Is woman so different to man? Is not the very rivalry of the sexes a proof of their similarity? But all this reasoning, all this argument, all this heart-ache assuaged only by prayers (which un-

wittingly were full of Alan), by soft music in church, early walks, hard work, all these brought no solution and no real comfort to the soul of Opalia. She felt that all a woman's occupations when not devoted to the love of a man or of children were so many makeshifts to cheat time. Sometimes she told herself that youth and custom and tradition were too strong for her.

It was May and the Academy was open. The thought of Alan still filled her mind as she walked up the steps of Burlington House. Crowds gathered round the picture of Alan D'Arcy, for his was the picture of the season. Oh! it struck her to the heart. The picture spoke straight to her, as Alan's soul was speaking to her when he painted it. It had but three prominent figures. The picture represented three figures standing at the gates of heaven.

Vaguely the gates were represented as golden bars coming from vaults of blue, and with columns like opals and rainbows. All was a hazy blue and gold and faint glory, while beyond a mist of golden light showed vaguely the entrance to the other world. Grovelling in darker vaults of blue crouched the eternally damned. At the very gates stood a young man gazing longingly at a figure, but a rosy-faced woman was dragging him away with her naked white arms. The sensual mouth, the wild excited air, all depicted this figure to be a portrait of Passion leading the young man to destruction, while his gaze remained mournfully, despairingly turned to the white-robed figure of Purity waving him away from the gates of heaven, and in that pure expression, half of severity, half tender pity and deepest love, Opalia recognized her own face.

This was the most terrible moment of her life ; the voice of the young man seemed to sound in her ears like Alan's voice saying, "Save me, save me." That is the most terrible temptation of all, when even the laws of God seem to set the seal of their sanction on an act we long to commit, yet which our conscience tells us is wrong.

CHAPTER III.

THERE is a tremendous gift given to those who have talent. It is the story of "To him that hath more shall be given," for with talent is given a solace for all pain. The man or woman who paints, who writes poetry or prose, these none of them understand the same poignancy of grief that the unemployed mind goes through. The artist who is disappointed in love finds the canvas and the quiet mysteriously lighted studio waiting for him. The writer pours his woes into his new novel and describes a love story with the pathos of experience. And the solace of his pain is perhaps the foundation of his success, and he wins from

the public the worship one heart has refused him. The heart that grieves is the heart that can only once grasp one idea, that wraps its very life round the object that it loves. To this kind of heart deception or change is like death.

For some time Alan grieved, for some months he tried to bring himself to Opalia's way of thinking, to study religion, for to him it seemed that an anchorite alone would suit her, then as the days went on he tried to imagine that after a time he would win her over, it became a poetic romance to him. It would be the story of the Iron-Master over again. There was something delightfully poetic in the thought of being side by side with this girl, teaching her day by day to love him, leading up day by day to the desired goal. How delightful would be a self-surrender, months after the wedding-day, with no

obligations, but from sheer love. No novel could come up to it, no poem be more beautiful. Surely it would be the perfection of married life.

Then as days came and posts so many and so swift as they are now brought no response to his appeals,—

“I will wait,” he had said, “till you come to me of your own free-will, even if it is years.” And she had responded, “You are very good to me, but I would not marry you under false pretences, years would make no difference. If they did I would despise myself.” Then with the slow falling away from religion to the desire to make religion and gratification meet came the slow sinking to the reverse, the longing for passion from without, impatience at the cold restraint placed upon him by his Madonna-like love. It was like the weariness one feels when one has

been very long on his knees in church. Why, why, he asked himself, should he lead this life of a monk? She did not love him enough, she had no passion, no pity. She did not understand man. Then came quickly as an answer to his thoughts a little missive :—

“ I find I can sit to you this afternoon, I will do more than that. Have tea in the garden and we can talk till seven. You will be tired by then of trying to make me turn my eyes up to heaven. They never will do that naturally. They look anywhere, even at you, rather than upwards. It is no use, I have green eyes. ‘ Les yeux verts vont en enfer à tantot mon ami.’ ”

“ Yours,

“ MINNIE MORRIS.”

The little pink note scented faintly with “ white lilac.” It represented the world, the flesh and the devil, and just then he

was in the mood for all three. Lady Morris, he had forgotten her, forgotten the foolish flirtation, which began by his arranging the fichu on her throat, and ended by his placing a kiss on her neck. Her apparent wrath, which had ended with another kiss, all this he had forgotten in that idyll by the sea. He had thought that the first image in his quaint old garden would be the tall, fair, stately lily called Opalia.

He had one of those quaint artistic houses in the neighbourhood of Holland Park. Having means of his own, and being no mean artist, he had turned it into a veritable Italian palace. A terrace at the back led by marble steps into a quaint old garden with alabaster seats and cool fountains, while tall old-fashioned plants, marjoram and water-mint, grew in tangled groups against the high walls, and

far beyond down in the corner was a spreading mulberry-tree, a few of which are still found in London, and it was underneath this mulberry-tree that Lady Morris suggested having tea.

It was a cool garden and a very picturesque one, full of sweetness, claiming for its character Bacon's definition,— "Because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air," and it had served as a background for many of his pictures. His windows looked out on it and the fir-trees and green coolness, the voices of a few London sparrows building under the eaves, the cool splashing of the fountain and the glinting of the gold-fish as they moved zigzag in the

water; this small corner kept alive the poetry of Alan's heart. To man no picture and no palace is complete without a beautiful woman. His dream had been Opalia with earnest eyes picking the first yellow roses from off the wall, or throwing bread crumbs to the golden fish. His reality was a little piquante brunette who arrived a few hours later in a smart brougham. The attributes of a smart society woman are a powerful artillery. The rich furs, the delicate lace, the well-dressed hair, the jewels, the rings, all these fascinate men's hearts. Somewhat a philosopher, he wondered as she left her hand some minutes in his, how she would have looked by the sea, like Opalia, with the wind tugging at her clothes and dashing her hair about. His artistic imagination revolted at the thought. Lady Morris was distinctly a drawing-room plant, each waxen leaf per-

fection, and, like many a society woman, she was an accomplished actress, and a clever one in her way, her greatest accomplishment being a thorough knowledge of the nature of man, especially as a past, present, or future lover. She saw at a glance that Alan had forgotten her—forgotten her as anything but a lady whose portrait he was painting, and she was too wise to remind him; besides, she had heard rumours of his engagement to an extraordinary girl with advanced views on marriage.

“Tout vient à bout à qui sait attendre.”

She was too full of tact to remark on his forgetfulness. She would see what new feature “Homoology” had to teach her. She walked about the studio, looking first at one picture, then at a sketch. She remembered (how misplaced was her memory) each picture that was then begun, and he was flattered.

“What are you showing this year?” she asked. He hesitated. To show his picture to Lady Morris was to disclose the secrets of his heart. There was so much soul in the picture that he feared that it must speak to others as it spoke to him.

Without answering, he drew the linen sheet back that covered the picture of “Purity and Passion.” He hoped that she would not ask him what it meant. She understood too well. All she said was,—

“Yes, I think very good people drive one to destruction.”

She had embodied his thought, yet he felt a sort of rage against her for understanding so well. Her words seemed a disloyalty of his own to Opalia. Almost angry, he said,—

“Yes, the destruction of those unworthy to follow them.”

“ My dear Mr. d'Arcy, if every one were good, the world would cease to exist. It is like a large saucepan in which none of us are yet ‘cuit a' point’ either for good or evil. For my part I am afraid that I rejoice that there is a little sin left. It is so enjoyable. I agree with the French-woman who, when she drank a glass of water, said, ‘C'est si bon, quel dommage que ce ne soit pas un péché.’ Now am I right ?” As she threw herself as nearly as possible into the pose he had tried to seize before.

For some time he worked in silence. Yellows, reds, hazy tints of brown and grey. He tried to fix his attention on these only. For two hours he was the artist, and she the silent model; but the air was charged with that extraordinary sexual electricity which rules the world, and is more than religion and honour.

Stronger than love or death, a strange magnetic current that seems to seize and terrify and paralyze the whole world. She was a pretty woman longing for a flirtation. He was a young man, ardent, poetic, artistic, with a passion for a beautiful woman who would not requite it. When he looked up, it was an inquiring, despairing look. It asked for an explanation of everything in this world. She answered it by saying,—

“Is it not time for tea? I am so tired.”

What they both really meant was,—

“What rot is everything in this world but love, the making love, the thrilling telling of love, the listening to love's requests.”

Lady Morris felt a little thrill of triumph.

“*Je vous l'avais dit!*” she said to herself.

And all this time she avoided the topic of his rumoured marriage, and the rumours of why it had been broken off ; and he, with his heart crying out for Opalia, and despising himself all the time, gazed into Lady Morris's soft brown eyes and pressed her hand, and finally found himself at half-past seven o'clock wrapping her cloak tightly round her and requesting her to return "for her picture next day."

And all the time he was saying almost out loud,—

"She has driven me to this ! She has driven me to this !"

And in his heart he knew it was a lie, and he drove Opalia from his heart as one forgets purposely to say one's prayers at night when one knows that one has sinned, and that one is not penitent enough to ask for pardon or to wish for it.

When the London season, with its strange

intoxication, with its extraordinary tumult and its horrible traffic, seized upon him, and Opalia was almost forgotten, to be remembered now and then only with a feeling of irritation that she should dare to be so beautiful and so wilful, a feeling of resentment that she should have come to disturb his life.

CHAPTER IV.

EXCEPT those with delicate and fibrous consciences, none could well enter into the feverish grief that overwhelmed Opalia as she left the Academy. She saw and looked at no other pictures, or if she saw them they seemed to point their fingers at her, as Gustav Doré's bulrushes pointed fingers at the murderer of Hood's fancy. "Save me! Save me!" came the cry. "You, with your cold, silvery purity, are driving me to Hell!" That is what the picture said clearly. With her strong power of self-analysis, she asked herself whether after all it was better to sacrifice herself to save the soul of a man, or whether this was the

fiercest temptation of all ; righteousness in the garb of her desires appealing to her ; the devil assuming the glory of a god-like sacrifice in order to dazzle her right judgment. In vain she asked herself what she had originally intended. She longed to go back again, to be clear as at the beginning. She opened her little book, in which she had jotted down her plan of life in short sentences that savoured of Marcus Aurelius. She opened it at the words,—

“ Whenever the problem of life is difficult, try and go back in thought to some stationary point, some thought of your early youth, when things seemed clear to you. Go back to the cross-roads and start afresh.”

Then again she read,—

“ If you find that you are acquiescing and agreeing too much with the advice and following too much the example of a friend,

stop and ask yourself if it is because your friend panders to your own weakness, or because your friend gives you good advice."

"If you are plucking lilies, note whether it is the purity of the flower that charms you, or whether the intoxication of the perfume fascinates your senses. Beware of evil in the garb of good."

"My heart is fixed, O Lord."

How easy is the path of right—how clearly defined evil is, when one is young. It is like the shadows and sunlight of the early morning, clear, concise, definite. Then later the heart is fixed, the intricacies so multifarious.

Opalia and her friend had written a little book together, of which the laws were more rigid than any Puritan. It had all seemed so simple then, like the shining pathway the moon throws across the sea that seems

to lead straight up to heaven. She still struggled to follow it. Surely light would come; but for days and nights all seemed darkness, with only now and then the cry of "Save me! Save me!"

Every day matured her thoughts. Every day some new experience came beneath her notice that showed her how passion ruled the world. Each maiden looked forward, each old maid looked backward to that one moment when she loved or was loved as the supreme moment of her life. Every song, every poem, every story spoke only of love, love, love.

What to her seemed worst of all was the fact that she knew that this deep passion people talked of was burning in her heart for Alan. She felt that she loved him as he would be loved, and yet she felt that to give in to it, delicious as the dream was, was to sink to the level of all those others

whose very being seemed to begin and cease with passion. Worst of all she realized (for the refinement of suffering is that which the heart goes through alone, not caused by any outward circumstance, but by the silent agony of its own crucifixion) that Alan must judge her from the world's standpoint, and from the standpoint of a passionate man, who, unable to realize the purgatory she was going through, would think that she loved him not enough.

The treading the wine-press alone, that terror comes to us all in life. No one would understand. That gulf between mind and mind ; the different mood coming at different hours ; that was the hardest of all to bear. And Alan—his life was for the moment like a hay-field of turned hay ; his work was neglected ; he followed in a feverish dream a woman who was not his ideal, but who represented sex

more frailly than Opalia. What he was seeking was woman in the abstract. Occasionally, when he thought of Opalia, he felt like a man who, having communed with angels on the heights of a mountain, has descended to earth again.

As yet his intimacy with Lady Morris, though fast developing into more than a flirtation, had not fallen to the depths of a low intrigue. She wondered still what kept him from openly declaring his passion. She longed for it, for the triumph over the unknown woman, whose influence she felt above all for the triumph of another's heart, to wring in her fingers as she had wrung others. Women love power, to hold a man's heart in their hands so that they can wring the blood from it, and see the drops trickling through their fair fingers; that is what they love; that is original sin. God made woman to be

the servant of man, and woman undid the work of God and tried to make man the servant of woman.

What kept him back was the remembrance of his talks with Opalia, the dim possibility of her coming back to him, the still dimmer certainty that any intervening episode would drive her for ever from him. He was like a man who refuses tea that he craves for, for fear it should spoil his dinner. He knew that he got no credit for his attitude, that the world put him down as Lady Morris's lover. He did not know, though it would have made no difference in his actions, that he would have been but one of a bevy of admirers. He saw the uplifted eyebrows, he listened to the remarks of his companions. Once, full of revulsion of feeling in favour of Opalia, he had expressed an opinion at the club of his

amazement at men's intrigues with women they knew nothing about.

"Hang it all, my boy," a friend had said, "we can't all be the lovers of a peer's wife."

There was something horrible in life, a wrong tinkle somewhere, that, like the un-tuned note of a piano, upset the tune, and jarred on the senses.

One of the greatest enigmas of Alan's life just now was the impossibility of realizing, or thinking of Opalia in the sense in which she would be thought of.

He had his dream; the lover's dream, made still more beautiful by the painter's thought. He pictured her on an Italian terrace in the moonlight, on the balcony of a Venetian palace, while the moonshine played beneath. He pictured her in a large garden, or at the lattice-window of an old manor-house. He pictured her in

every garb, in every attitude ; but each picture drew himself by her side, his arm encircling her, their lips meeting in that one first kiss. He could not depict any ending but this, and when he strove to drive himself away from that picture the rest seemed colourless and dead.

“ A penny for your thoughts,” said Lady Morris.

“ They would not be worth that to you,” he was about to say, but changed it to “ a woman.”

“ Such wise, deep thoughts, beyond the comprehension of a weak woman’s brain ? Tell me those thoughts,” she had said, with the pretty peremptoriness which belongs to women who are in love, or think they are.

He got up and came and stood before her, clasped his arms, and looked down at her.

"I was wondering" (his whole attitude was one of inquiry), "I was wondering whether"—he hesitated how to put it—"I was wondering whether it would be possible if one were very much in love, to eliminate passion?"

She mistook his meaning, thinking this an indirect way of addressing her. She answered,—

"No, I am afraid it would be impossible."

"Impossible on the woman's part or on the man's?"

"Both," was the answer, with a slight quiver through her whole body. "It would be impossible to both; the day would come when temptation would come from somewhere, or indifference would set in. Besides," she added, "passion is the deepest expression of love; one could not care for a man who did not love one pas-

sionately, a man would soon tire of a woman who did not."

"You think that?" he said, and returned to his work only half satisfied.

He painted on, but the studio was full of electric effluvia, the magnetism which exists when a man and a woman find themselves thrown on each other's society. There is an uncertain expectancy in the air. Each one rushing towards a crisis, hurrying it on at one moment, holding it back at another, conscious that the crisis will be the beginning of a new era, either a better or a worse, but the delicious half dawn, the twixt sleeping and waking of unconfessed love will be over.

Both Alan and Isabel Morris knew that they were drifting towards that crisis; "a nothing" would have sufficed to snap off this friendship, and change it into an

almost cold acquaintance. It was skin-deep, but it had all the outward appearance of a passion. When they were not together they hardly gave each other a thought, when they were together they were two representatives of sex, *ni plus ni moins*. Her worldly wisdom made her a sympathetic companion, for she knew the colouring matter of each virtue she did not possess, and she was able to assume appearances. He was an artistic body, a worshipper of beauty, and just now a seeker of love.

Like all young men, he was constantly meeting it in different forms, and in the form of Lady Morris it did not displease him, although in that form he neither desired it nor believed in it. There was also the slight hesitation or reticence of a man who earns his bread by a profession. He is never quite sure how far he may advance

with a lady of Society. It was perhaps this which gave her more boldness in her manner towards him, this, and the fear lest she should lose him, a fear that is the origin of all woman's divergence from the path of duty.

Women could be friends with men platonically for ever.

Suddenly, with a swift movement that was one of her charms and gave her love affairs the appearance of sincerity and impulse, she rushed across the room towards Alan, and before he knew where she was, or what she was about to do, she had placed her arms round his neck, and kissing him on the hair, she said,—

“What is the use of hiding it? You know that I love you.”

The situation was not one of his making. It was brought about by the hysterical desire of a frivolous woman to bring some

interesting features into her life. We all know that the great pervading elements of life, death, love, happiness, grief, are the really absorbing ones, and the very smartest woman who seems to have no thought beyond her black pug and her smart gowns, generally creates for herself the most pathetic and thrilling situations.

It was not of his seeking ; like Adam he could cry out, "The woman tempted me." But even as he turned round and clasped her in his arms, as the words, "My own darling," fell from his lips, there rose between them a pale phantom of Opalia. He saw her in his imagination—pale, tearless, bowed with grief, yet unreproachful. Lady Morris saw her as one sees the pale blue sky through the trees. She felt, as he pressed her in his arms, that she was not wholly his.

"You do not care for me really," she said reproachfully.

"I hardly know if I am capable of caring," he answered.

"It is always so," she said sadly, and her words, though partly theatrical, had a tinge of real sadness, for, like a spoilt child, her toy did not please her. The doll could not talk. It only opened and shut its eyes. When the woman loves the man does not, and so the other way too.

Alan threw down his brush. What was the good of working, of seeking the solitude of his studio, if temptation followed him ? "What was the use of a fellow trying ? "

There was a demoralizing atmosphere in the studio. The solitude was so different to a private house, where spies that one pays oneself are always hovering around. The old Portuguese servant never disturbed his master while he was painting.

The air was full of the scents of summer flowers. In the distance the Hungarian band was playing in some garden near, where a garden-party was going on. Further on, the distant roll of carriages brought to the ear a whiff of measured energy and excitement. There was so much life, so much peace here, and the woman at his side was so beautiful.

Man's weakest point is his vanity, and the fact that the smart, pretty, Society lady lay with her head on his shoulder was in itself a sensation.

Opalia's image, her influence, both were waning, just as our good angel (as we are told in our childhood) veils his face and goes back to heaven if he sees us do something naughty.

The present was very sweet, and they were both young, but as yet he only kissed her now and then. At last they wandered

into the garden under the trees, and there he seized her face between both his hands and looked into her eyes.

“What is love?” he asked, but expected no answer to his question from her.

“I do not know,” she answered, “unless it is two beings who wish always to be together, who trust each other absolutely.”

“Is it not more than that?”

“What more could you have?” she asked impatiently. “I am ready to do all you ask, to be everything to you.”

“Ah!” he had hardly thought of that. That was how she looked upon it, that was a woman’s idea of love, or of what men expected of love. It was horrible, yet how reject her without wounding her?

“Have you thought of all you are risking?” he said, “of all you are sacrificing? Of your husband, your children, your position?”

She looked at him with wide open eyes of surprise.

"They won't know," she said; "why should they? What difference would it make to them? My husband has never understood me. He does not know or care where I am or what I do. Oh! Alan, don't remind me of my unhappy life; let me come sometimes, and in your arms forget that I am Lady Morris, with ten thousand a year and a position and no happiness, and let me be happy."

"Look," she went on, standing up and straightening her hat and smoothing the lace he had ruffled at her throat. "To-day is Tuesday, on Thursday Morris dines out. He will probably return at midnight, and if he finds me out will imagine I am at Lady Harris's party. It is so easy for a Society woman to go wrong," she added rather bitterly in an aside.

“ If you will have me, I will come here immediately after dinner and remain with you till twelve, or, better still, you shall take me somewhere to dine. I know—.” She stopped suddenly, she was telling too much.

“ Where could we dine ? ” she asked, innocently.

It all took Alan’s breath away.

“ But surely it would be impossible ? ”

“ Nothing, surely, is impossible to two people who care. Thursday, at eight, you will call for me. No, I think it is better that I should call for you, so that the servants should not know. I will call for you, and you will think of some quiet place to dine—and then——”

“ How I shall long for Thursday,” she murmured, as he wrapped her cloak round her.

Like one in a dream, Alan returned to the studio.

“This comes too late,” he murmured. “I have culled the wild fresh strawberries on the mountain side, I cannot now eat the hothouse ones steeped in cream.”

“Opalia! Opalia! save me!” he cried. “Can you not see what you are doing? Can you not understand that your mission, the mission of all pure women, is to fight against the other women, not against men? We are the weak, you are the strong, but you don’t know it. Your curse is, that you do not know why you are in the world.”

He had never loved Opalia so truly, or understood her theories and principles so well as the night that Lady Morris offered him all that Opalia kept back.

Opalia was not happy. Nursing and visiting, although they brought interest and solace, were not to a character like hers absorbing enough to carry her away. She recognized the dire distress, the need for

beautifying and helping on the lives she came in contact with ; but she found, as we all find, that the beautiful romantic poetry of poverty does not exist. In books the poorest cottage always has a spotless floor and a flower in the window, and the heroine, probably the mother of five or six children, after cooking and washing all day, and doing in a few hours work that would occupy several days in reality, clean and tidy, and, with a smile on her beautiful countenance, appears cheerfully at the tea-table to welcome her husband. In real life the floor is invariably dirty, and a beer jug stands on the window-sill, a ragged, unkempt, slatternly woman dispenses oaths to her numerous offspring, or sends them out to get a "pint" for which she cannot afford to pay.

Opalia had gone through all the disappointments women go through. She

had become a teetotaler to save one woman, and found that the woman who promised to abstain with her drank all the fiercer secretly, thus adding to the crime by "breaking the pledge," for those who have broken a vow fall lower than any other.

She had sat by the agonized bedside of fallen girls, who had gone on the streets as soon as they were well again. It seemed hopeless, and, worst of all, was the daily contact with passion in its lowest and most degrading forms. She realized every day more and more that a crusade against passion would be the only possible salvation of the world. That in the pure, passionless life of Christ lay the power and the grandeur, the salvation, to curb or restrain passion, to render it holy; to blend it with a daily higher life was impossible, and yet, whenever her work was done, her

steps led her to the Academy to Alan's picture. The enemy was gnawing at her very heart. Passion, the all-absorbing passion, which she met and combated everywhere, was wearing away the hours of her life, and twixt her longing to be with Alan, and her fear of meeting him, her life became almost intolerable.

One evening an indescribable melancholy, a dissatisfaction, almost a feeling of defeat, an indescribable bitterness at Alan's silence, though it had been inspired by herself, possessed her. She left her work early, intending to walk to Regent's Park, and there amongst the flowers sit down and think, work out the ever-recurring enigmatic problem ; but unconsciously her feet took her along Piccadilly, to the door of Burlington House. The Queen's Drawing Room had made the rooms less crowded, and it was late. Slowly the tall figure

walked to the second room where Alan's picture, hung "on the line," collected, as usual, a small crowd. Almost Opalia fancied that it must be her likeness to the picture (for this likeness she fully recognized) that made people fall back and let her come near the picture; but she was wrong, it was the presence of the painter himself which caused this flutter. Turning round, she saw Alan—Alan, who to her had been not only the embodiment of love itself, but the embodiment of all that success and the development of those theories that would ultimately save the world, the Alan who for one moment had seemed almost a god that stood before her, the same dear face, but more worn. Was it with grief, she wondered, or weariness of life, or worse? But she would not doubt him. Her Alan would always be true. His dealings with her had been those

actuated by truth only. His very severance cleared him of all hypocrisy. He had judged her by his own standard. He had realized that what she said she meant. He had not treated her as if she suffered from some hysterical mania that would disappear. He had believed in and respected her convictions, and the very certainty of her intention, the genuineness of her theories, made it impossible for him to marry her unless he was prepared to fulfil her conditions.

“Oh ! I am so glad to see you again,” she said. She was more than glad, but there was an excess of emotion in her voice, because of the pangs of conscience she had gone through. She wanted him so much to know how dearly she loved him. All that she could do, short of breaking her principles, she would do gladly to show him how dear his welfare was to her. His

emotion was very great, so great that he said in the most commonplace voice, which chased away the gasping thickness that had gathered in his throat,—

“Fancy meeting you here, Miss Woodgate!”

Ah! if he only knew how often she had come there. True to the lines that she had mapped out for herself, that he should not sink into evil because she shrank from confessing her love, she said,—

“I have come here almost daily since the Academy opened.”

His answer was one look of deep inquiry. “What did she mean by those words? Had her feelings changed?”

“I cannot talk here,” he said; “come out with me.”

They walked out, and she turned to the left, intending walking homewards.

“Tell me,” he said, when they got out-

side, "do you understand the picture ?
Who it was meant for ?"

She bowed her head in acquiescence.
He paused, then, as she remained silent,
he went on, " And what do you think ?"

Oh, the exquisite pain of that question,
to have to step back from the radiant
moment of meeting, back into the black
hours of the past. Surely that was the
bitterest hour of her life.

Quickly she walked on, with him by her
side. She could not answer. Surely not
here in this crowd, with gay carriage-
fulls and advertisement-hidden omnibuses
passing backwards and forwards along
the roads.

By the intervention of a solicitor, the
husband of a friend of hers, she had
succeeded in getting two rooms in one of
those lonely courts that lay betwixt the
Strand and Lincoln's Inn Fields. Strange

old-world courts, with perhaps a tiny plot of grass or struggling lime tree in their midst, with a strange quiet that speaks to one of old days. Old staircases that creak at every tread, as if each step evoked a memory or cried for justice against some bygone sentence. This was the retreat Opalia had brought her weary mind to. It was inexpensive and poetic, and near her poor district.

“What a delightful place!” said Alan; and he was glad to find that his love had chosen a rest away from the eyes of the world, and in keeping with her quaint impressiveness.

They ascended the stairs, and the room they entered was still more what he would have wished the room of his wife or his sweetheart to have been. Cool and quiet, and yet lived in, with birds and flowers and books, with every sign of work and energy and charm about it.

She motioned to him to sit down, and she stood herself. She could always speak better standing. Then she realized that there was nothing to say. That she did not even know if he still loved her.

"You have not answered me," he said, and there was a world of entreaty in his voice.

"If you wish for my answer about your picture," she said, "I think it beautiful."

"Is that all?"

"What more would you have?" She dreaded the next question.

"What do you think of the subject?"

In the midst of the pleasure and the pain of his presence, the delight of the sound of his voice, the worship of his presence, she knew, she felt (it seemed as if duty had possession of her soul and strove to torture it) that her answer must be this,—

"If a man's salvation depends on

woman's passion, he is not worthy of the name of man."

But she was spared this—spared this upheaval of innermost agony.

He leant back on the sofa close to her window, and slowly and deliberately said to her,—

"Opalia," he said, "it has come to this, which of us is to give in?"

At that moment Opalia was like a tiny rose-leaf on the crest of a tidal wave, a wee, wee grass on a stormy sea. All the weakness of her womanhood came before her. She felt weaker in soul and mind and body. It was her hour to give in; to give in at that moment meant the greatest power, the power over a man's heart—and a great tender heart worth the swaying. The surrender was a despotic government on a tiny throne over one subject—a world of bliss on a square foot of earth. To

resist was the salvation of the world. The restoration of womanhood in its original sense, the original Divine sense before the Fall, it was better than the being mated with angels, it was uniting oneself with the Divine in all the glory of its holiness ; yet, to bring this home, must she not prove that the other love was there—that it was a passion overcome, not a passion unmoved, that she offered to him ?

He must know how she loved him ! Slowly, as one hypnotized, she walked towards him, craven fear making her movements tremulous and hesitating, like those of a sleep-walker ; the double fear lest she should not persuade him enough, and so peril his soul, or by showing him too much, show reluctance that meant the imperilling of her own. Slowly she walked towards the sofa, and he watched her as he would have watched a somnambulist or a

mad woman. Slowly she seated herself, or rather half knelt, on the sofa. Slowly, with movements heavy with passion, yet with a strange earnestness in her look, like a being torn asunder with emotion, she laid her hands on his shoulder, opened the lappels of his coat, and kissed his heart.

"I love you still," she said, laying her head on his neck. She kissed him on his cheeks and on his hair and under his chin, then on his eyes, and lastly her lips sought his. Slowly, like a man in a dream, his lips returned the kiss, dwelling there an eternity, drawing her life and giving his, asking but to die at that moment. Then with exquisite grace and a faint sigh, half of regret, half of ecstasy, she sank back into his arms.

"Alan," she said presently, quite softly, laying one hand to still the beating of his heart that thumped against her tiny ear.

“Alan, do you believe now that I love you?”

“Yes! Oh, yes!” he murmured faintly, almost impatient at her voice, that broke the ecstatic charm, the ineffable delight of that moment.

“Then listen to me,” she murmured; and he, fearful with some faint dread that came of instinct, without so much as placing his arm round her, listened.

She was kneeling now between his knees, and her two hands were clasped on his breast, and she looked into his eyes.

“Alan,” she murmured, “that is the love that I bear you, that is the love that I feign would give you, those are the kisses I will give you. More than this I dare not give—more than this you must not ask. You asked just now which should give in. I have given in to the

extent of my power, to the extent of my conscience. If that satisfies you—if it satisfies you to know that I would gladly give more but dare not, then, Alan, I am yours. But, Alan, if it is too hard, if not knowing what a man is I ask too much, leave me and let us be good friends only. Alan, darling Alan, my life, my love, for my sake do not go to the bad. Marry some woman without my ideas, who will be all to you that I fail in; but oh, Alan, do not for the sake of God, and for the sake of the love I bear you, do not let my scruples be my curse. Do not let my fight for purity be the staff that strikes you down into the mire."

She was sobbing now softly on his bosom, and he, moved with her kisses and the sweet passionate figure that clung to him with a faint murmured half formed

dread of what the future might unfold, whispered in her ear,—

“Enough, enough, what are you saying ? For one kiss such as you gave me I would gladly die. I give in, Opalia, I give in,” and so their betrothal took place.

It was almost dusk, the last charwoman, the latest clerk had left the court, yet those two sat on. At last eight o'clock struck from her tiny travelling clock on her writing-table.

“Good God ! eight o'clock, and it was Thursday—Lady Morris—” he started. “I must go,” he said, but nothing dictated those words, only the instinct of a courteous, punctual man, not to fail in his engagements. “Good-night, my own sweet darling,” and once more he sought her lips, but this time she turned her head away, and pressing his hand gently in hers she said with deepest tenderness,—

“Good-bye, my own sweet husband,
good-bye and thank you, for my cup is
almost too full.”

“May I never fail you,” he said, “so
help me God,” and left her.

CHAPTER V.

THE incongruousness of events, the friction between dispositions, is generally the result of the right moods not coming at the right time or concurrently in people. Just as we feel peaceful feelings towards our enemy, he is most angry with us, and by some unkind word stirs up all the dormant feelings of wrath we had striven to lull to rest. But he too has had his moments of gentleness, had we but known it, and approached him then. Just as a. the faint refraction of passion he had felt for Lady Morris was dissolving beneath the strong radiance of the renewal of his

betrothal with Opalia, Lady Morris had worked herself up to almost a real feeling of love for the painter. The whole day she had been in a dream, thinking of the evening. Of a reckless disposition, and brought up with lax surroundings and no principles beyond those required by Society, she contemplated without an atom of compunction a complete self-surrender, forgetting that it had not yet been asked of her. With her vivid imagination, she pictured Alan longing for her kisses, yet not daring to ask for them.

Punctually at eight o'clock she called at his door. The Portuguese servant with an unmoved countenance answered that Monsieur was out, and had left no message. A great rage swept over her. It was the smart Society woman that had lowered herself to love beneath her. With her keenest feelings outraged, her heart beat, but in

a voice which rang with a clear supercilious distinctness, she said,—

“ Please tell him that I want to see him in the morning. I called to say that I cannot sit for my picture to-morrow.”

At that moment Alan's cab drove up. He had no plan of action, no thoughts threshed out. All he knew was that his meeting with Opalia made it impossible for him to continue even an appearance of flirtation with Lady Morris possible. Not only must he reject her advances, but he must exercise such control over himself as to reject them with a strength that would create a precedent of resistance against all temptations. He had no doubt that with such love as Opalia bore him, the combat after marriage would not last long, surely such love, such surrender, was worth waiting for.

He felt that his excuses were scant and

empty. His feelings were not in unison with those of Lady Morris's. He had been detained, he had made a mistake. Had she dined? A great doubt came over Lady Morris's mind, for her tact and good taste stood her in lieu of virtue. Should she go back? Perhaps what influenced her most was what her servants would think. That is the great motive power of England. The opinion of the servants. There are many of us who, like Mr. Merdle, hang themselves from fear of the "chief butler."

There was no dinner at home. In the home of the rich there is never any food to be had unless it is ordered. It is only the poor cottager whose bread and cheese is always standing on the dresser. She was also very hungry. Most pretty women have good appetites.

Alan was also hungry, and perhaps this

animal and physical reason was the only one that led the two to repair to a little Bohemian artistic restaurant Alan knew of close by, to dine. The man who invented champagne is responsible for a great many crimes. There is an extraordinary subtle link between champagne and vice; whether vice ends in champagne or champagne in vice is still a problem to be solved, but there is no doubt that champagne is the Lethe in which Satan steeps the consciences of his victims. The chloroform of their good resolves.

Lady Morris was the representative of a type one meets every day in different classes. It is indeed a class of its own, and may have sprung from an ancient line of ancestry or from the streets — the Bohemian-adventuress type, which only needs temptation and surroundings to develop it. This type is generally good-

natured and passionate, artistic and changeable, and it is a type that is on the increase every day.

The champagne, the sparkling lights, the freedom, above all the slightly *risqué* situation, and last but not least the fact that she was with a man she cared for and who suited her, and who was still a little difficult to get hold of; all this made Lady Morris a most charming companion tonight, and with Opalia's kisses still on his lips Alan would have been more than a man (and less than an angel if Scripture is to be believed) if he did not see that this particular daughter of man was beautiful.

There are waves in our life of which we are not conscious, great moments of success we do not realize. In one day two women had lured Alan to the extent of their powers. Two women were ready to die for him if necessary. Passion and Purity had

thrown themselves at his feet in one hopeless adoration. But he loved lilies more than roses, and Opalia's image haunted him ; haunted him between the enamoured glances of Lady Morris's sleepy, passionate eyes ; haunted him even while carried away by her brilliant conversation, by pert sallies which he answered like a schoolboy, but his very verbosity was the result of the new joy that Opalia's kisses had evoked. For her sake he loved all women. For her sake the world looked cheery, and there was something to live for, and Lady Morris reaped the reflection of the heat of his passion for Opalia.

He hailed a hansom, and after Lady Morris entered it, did not follow her. He stood and asked her where he was to tell the cabman to drive to.

There was a disappointed look, almost a quiver of the lashes, as she answered,—

"I was going to the studio, Alan, for a few moments, to—to have a cigarette and look at the picture by candlelight."

It would have needed a "Coligny" to resist such an appeal. No chivalrous man would have made a scene at the door of a restaurant, have so wounded a woman's feelings as to say, "I must send you back to your home." So it is that the small conventionalities of life rule our destinies.

He jumped into the cab by her side with divided feelings, one half was a strange resignation to the inevitable, one half a dream; yet through the whole he felt a sort of bullet-proof feeling, as if Opalia had bewitched him with a strange sweet spell.

As they drove along each was influenced differently by the cool night air. Alan's brain was gradually growing cooler. He was trying to focus the situation and to prepare himself for the sequel which he

felt still lay before him. This night must be a decisive one. Lady Morris was simply in a flutter of ecstasy at having at last attained the acme of her wishes. A thrilling situation without fear of discovery with a loyal man who would not give her away and a man who was coveted by another woman—in fact by many women. It was too thrilling for words. She thought with delight of her friends who were probably starting for parties at that moment. Oh ! they did not know the pleasure of real love ! With a strange little throb, which was almost real, she slipped her arm through his. He returned her pressure by drawing his arm close to her side. It was all for the last time, nothing mattered much as Opalia loved him ; he had only one thought, that of being worthy of Opalia. He had no intention of giving way to Lady Morris ; on the contrary, to-night would be

his farewell, and if by a few well-chosen words he could imbue her with some of the pure feelings Opalia had expressed, his evening would have been well spent. Meanwhile he pitied this woman for the love she bare him, and he hoped she would not suffer much, for he did not quite understand the type which, like the honeysuckle, clings to new walls if torn away from the old.

They reached the studio, and Alan paid the cab and opened his door with a key.

“ You really wish to come in ? ” he said, and as she did not answer he entered first, holding the door open for her to enter. The hall was of marble, with great tiger-skins stretched out ; her high-heeled shoes made a clatter as she walked across the hall. The great oak staircase was in darkness, but in a moment at a touch all was lit by electric light. She mounted the

stairs she had mounted so often lately with a light step, little thinking with what feelings she would descend them. Sin was very close to both, but the soul of one longed for it, the soul of the other recoiled from it.

They entered the studio, and all was dark there, save for the glitter of some flames from a log fire. The Portuguese servant always kept this alight in case his master should wish to work at night and be cold. On a table stood a tray, the glass on it shimmered in the fire-light. There were wine and biscuits on the tray, and fruit.

“Do not light the lights,” said Lady Morris, as he made a movement to turn the electric light on, “Let us talk by the fire.”

She knelt down on the rug as she spoke, and lowered her cloak, and her yellow gauzy dress gleamed, and her diamonds

sparkled, and the firelight brought out her beautiful profile. As an artist he admired the picture, as a man he felt the temptation, but as Opalia's lover he tried to put it all aside. He could not help noting her face—how sweet and passionate and earnest it was. How different that life might have been, well guarded by a tender mother or a really devoted, sensible husband, above all away from London and its terrible great luring lights. While he watched he looked about in his innermost being for words that would convey the deepest meaning, for words that would not wound, for words that would stir to better impulses. For Opalia's sake he would like to reclaim this woman ; he would get at her through love as Opalia had reached him through love. Powerless as men are to understand the thoughts of women, yet tender as only strong men are, he strove to review this

woman's life. Oh ! if Opalia were there. A woman's presence was almost a desecration. Opalia's presence pervaded the home of the master of her heart. It would be to make him too near perfection, too little a man if one did not confess that for one moment the thought of passion as a passing momentary satisfaction, the realization of the woman's wishes without harm to himself, passed through his brain. To make his temptation less would be to lessen his victory. Once or twice the mystery of the situation, the silence, the beauty of the woman, the darkness, the mute pleading for love, her readiness to give up her all, made him falter. He paced the room in silence, while she heaped on log after log, waiting for she knew not what, conscious in all this of the woman waiting, half impatient yet half dreading, with a strange sleepy feeling of *bien-être* stealing over her.

She half sat, half knelt by the fire, while Alan paced the room, dreading yet longing to speak, fearing yet pining to end a situation which was unbearable to him. It was characteristic of the man that he took no double path, no by-way.

“Isabel,” he said, coming, and kneeling, too, by the fire, and holding her two hands in a tight grasp. “Isabel, why have you come here to-night?”

Lady Morris looked dazed.

“Because I love you,” she said, disengaging her hands, and throwing herself against his heart with a movement that was childlike and full of trust. It was difficult for him to speak with her arms round his neck.

“Lady Morris.”

“Oh! don’t call me that.”

“Well, Isabel, you have come here to-

day because you love me. Dearest, I thank you for that love, I thank you for the love you have given me, but I should be worse than a beast if I were to accept it."

Something in his tone arrested her attention; a great sorrow rose in her heart, and he went on,—

"First of all, I am not free, I belong heart and soul and body to another woman; I love that woman, and that woman loves me."

"Oh! Alan, but I love you, too," murmured Lady Morris.

"It is very good of you," he murmured. "I can never forget what you have offered me to-night; I want you to remember that I shall never think badly of you. The very fact of your presence here shows me that you trust me. You are here in my power, yet you know that you have

nothing to fear, and that is why you came."

"No, Alan, I came because I longed for your kisses. Oh, Alan, just to-night, let me be happy. Think of how little love I have in life, how little pleasure. You, and this, this woman, are you to have everything in life, and I nothing? Surely she would not grudge me one night's happiness?"

"It would not be happiness to either," he said. Then more gravely, he added,—

"Lady Morris, do not tempt me further, do not compel me to hate myself and you."

"Oh!" She gave a little muffled shriek, and he went on,—

"Do not make me unworthy of the woman who trusts me; as a woman respect the feelings of an affianced woman. You have your children, think of them; they

are sleeping now, with their dreams full of you, or perhaps one is awake, calling and longing for you. Your husband trusts and respects you. Every moment you are here you jeopardize your position, you run the risk of losing your children. Those pretty children of yours. Every moment that you stay you make me weaker, you degrade yourself. Be strong, Lady Morris, Isabel, if you will." He rose as he spoke, and extended one hand to her and raised her. They stood by the mantel-piece together.

"Oh ! Alan, I cannot," she said, "you ask too much," and weeping, she fell into his arms.

Then from sheer pity he tried kindness.

"Little one," he said, "you must for my sake, you must for your children's sake. What is life but one long sacrifice ? Will you rebel at your first temptation ?"

He walked to where her cloak was hang-

ing, and coming, back, he held it over her shoulders.

"One kiss," she said, turning round as it were inside her cloak.

He stooped down, then the thought of Opalia came like whiffs of sweet country scents, and he turned his face away.

"Not even that?" said Lady Morris, and there was a great gulp in her throat.

To prevent the wreck of her self-esteem, Alan said,—

"I want to spare you any remorse; one day you would be sorry even for that kiss."

He wrapped her cloak round her and opened the door. Then he followed her down and across the marble hall. She felt cold and wretched. He hailed a cab, and silently placed her in it, and gave the address to the cabman.

The man rattled off, his horse's hoofs

making that strange hollow sound that horses' hoofs make at night on the wooden pavement.

“God bless you,” he said, as she drove off; but in her heart was a subtle rage, and a thirst for vengeance.

CHAPTER VI.

ALAN's engagement was one of the most trying ordeals a man ever went through, in one way, and one of the most beautiful and artistic episodes of his life in another. It was like an ideal week in an ideal summer in an ideal place. Yet he felt like a man stepping over earth where new grass has been sown, and who realizes the tenderness of the green blades that are forming beneath. There was so much to be worked out during his engagement. He had to find out his own powers of endurance, he had to contemplate that all his life would be like this engagement, there

would be no culminating point, no reaching the goal, no full and complete happiness attained. It would be a story without an end, a longing that was never satisfied. And deep down in his heart was the hope which he daily tried to stifle, that one day Opalia would give in, either from weakness or changed convictions. Yes, though he knew it not, this was the mainspring of his patience. It could not be for ever—it could not. In all the annals of life and of humanity, in tales of fairyland and mythology, the wildest imagination could not picture such a state of things. Yet the delicate wooing had a charm all its own which appealed to his artistic temperament, and to the tenderness of his nature.

Opalia was madly, wildly happy, for like all unmarried women (and married women too, for the matter of that), she did not realize the extent of the sacrifice she was exacting.

The daily companionship of her lover, his infinite tenderness and triumph over passion, the absolute subjugation of the man she loved, all this was intoxication.

Yet she, too, realized that there was a something wanting in their courtship, an element of disappointment to him, a want of sap in their conversation that she knew did not exist between other engaged couples! All this she recognized. For some weeks the engagement was ideal, because neither touched on the topic which lay nearest their heart. He was content to remember the kisses she had once given him, and ask for no more. She was content—more than content to ride and drive and walk with him, and to talk for hours of their plans. They would travel and go to Italy. He could paint there, and he could teach her to paint, teach her how to appreciate art, which is a

knowledge lost to a great many people. Then they would settle down in London and buy a cottage for the autumn months on the river, for Opalia had money enough and to spare. Once she said laughing,—

“ You see one of the advantages of our engagement will be that we can spend all our money on ourselves, for there will be no chilren to save for, to educate, to start in life, or to endow.”

The words jarred on him. To have a son or a daughter somehow seems to a man of more importance than a woman. A woman's idea of offspring is like that of a little girl longing for a new doll ; it is something to play with, and to fondle, to dress and undress, to scold and to love, to hold in her arms and teach to walk.

A man's ideal of offspring is much more serious. He realizes none of the little thrills of delight, the choosing of little

garments is wasted upon him, the little pink legs have no fascination, a man's idea of a son is a copy of the Creator. His son seems to him his own creation, for in him he thinks he sees himself, or what he would have wished to have been. It is like a man who sees his own reflection in a glass without his knowing it, and who says, "What a fine-looking man. How well he walks!"

When she spoke these words he seized her wrists, and said so earnestly that she was startled,—

"Have you realized what you say, Opalia? Have you thought of life, not now while you are young and beautiful, but later? Have you pictured a childless old age? Have you thought that perhaps I shall fail you, that I may not come up to your ideal? I may disappoint you, and the solace of motherhood will be denied you!"

Have you weighed all this? Have you thought, Opalia, that I may die, and that you will have no companion, no link with me?"

She quivered as he spoke, but with the tender gracefulness that made her so seductive, and riveted his love without the lurings of passion, she leaned against his shoulder, and, looking up into his face, said,—

"If you were to die, Alan, no child, no companion could comfort me. I should want to die too."

But she thought it over afterwards. She was too sensible, too much a woman of the world, too great a lover of children, to deny to herself the truth of his words. She knew that a childless home was generally a cheerless home, a childless old age a lonely one, that without children a life had only its own aims and ended with its

own aspirations, could only build on its own success and grieve over its own failure. But this was part of the plan, this was part of the sacrifice; to shrink from it merely weakness. She was lucky to have the happiness of Alan's intellectual companionship, of his devoted love to fill her life. There were moments, of course, when jars would come from outside sources, for Opalia was anxious that her friends and the world should know of this ideal contract she was making. To let the world imagine that her relations with Alan were to be like those of anyone else, was to defeat the object of the sacrifice, if sacrifice it was.

The world took the news as the world takes everything, with absolute callousness and with pity, putting down to folly what it was not capable of understanding. The heaviest clog on earth to talent, science, virtue and happiness is "public opinion."

The people who took it worst were her relations, the person who upheld her least her own mother, the one who irritated her most a cousin, who said,—

“But fancy, my dear, how the world will laugh when you give in as you will have to at last, and as to your baby it will have to be exhibited at the Aquarium as the child of the ‘Woman who Wouldn’t.’ It will be quite phenomenal.”

This speech made Opalia hold out more than anything else. It rankled for many years.

Now and then, like the threatening of a storm on a summer’s day, there was a distant rumbling of thunder which scared Opalia. Now and then Alan let a word escape him which made her doubtful of the wisdom of her act in marrying Alan. Was it for his happiness? Was it quite fair to use his affection as a weapon to coerce

him, to press him into a cause which he had not intended, and had no wish to defend? Should she not have waited till she found a true soul longing for sacrifice?

Once she said to him,—

“ Is it too hard? Am I asking too much? ”

The evening before their wedding, she sought him out in her mother's little garden. There had been no announcement in the papers. There was to be no wedding feast, no bridesmaids; a white frock lay ready for the little ceremony the next day. There was to be no publicity, so if he thought better of it and they were to break it off, there would be no scandal. She felt no mistrust of her lover, no doubt as to whether he would keep his promise afterwards, no misgivings of his fidelity, all she wished to prevent was disappointment afterwards.

"Alan," the soft voice was calling him, then a lovely, shapely young arm was slid into his. He had been wandering up and down restlessly in the darkness. He too was doubtful of the position. It was so different to what he had imagined the eve of his wedding night would be. There was no expectation, no longing for the morrow. He could allow himself no impatience. Impatience would be useless, for patience would bring no reward. There was a want of colour and warmth and richness in the future. All the small nothings that make married life would be wanting. He hardly knew how she meant to divide her time, how far she meant the intimacy to go, how much companionship she meant to give him.

He had asked her mother to find out what arrangements she wished made about

her apartments, but all seemed at cross purposes because to a girl this question was incomprehensible.

"There need be no difference," she said to her mother, and when the latter had answered,—

"It must be one thing or another," she had answered,—

"Alan understands me."

Alan was dazed by the situation. It was one of two things. Either in all this Opalia had a plan which would end in the realization of his dearest dreams, by paths of her own by which she would gradually lead him, or she looked upon him as her ideal Knight of the Cross, capable of any sacrifice, and to this ideal he must live up. One thing he realized, and that was that it was impossible for either to fully understand each other till after the marriage, and this was what he imagined was her wish,

to gradually grasp the unknown when he was less a stranger to her.

“Alan,” the soft voice called him again. “I want to talk to you for the last time; I want to know if you quite realize what I want.”

It was as if she had read his thoughts. In a mad access of passion he seized her in his arms and covered her face, her eyes, her hair . . . her lips, with passionate kisses.

“I know, I know what you want,” he said, “but can you not see that it is impossible? How can I live by your side day by day, and look at your beauty, feel the soft warmth of your arms as they slip into mine, look at that throat, hear your sweet voice, and the scent of your breath close to me, and yet keep my promise?”

All the poet, the artist, and the lover was

mingled in the passion of his half-closed lids, the low, subdued, hoarse utterance of his voice.

“It is impossible, Opalia. I love you too much ; I cannot, cannot keep my promise.”

“Oh, Alan !” the words came after a long pause. The upheaval of her being had not yet recovered and settled down from his embrace, but there was anguish in the voice. It spoke unutterable things ; there was terror. If he so gave way now, what would the future unfold ? Nothing but misery and disappointment, sorrows for herself, heart-breakings for himself. There was dismay in her voice, because this meant an end to all the dreams of reforming and purifying the world, but there was infinite love and tenderness in her voice, for it meant farewell to Alan and to happiness, an end to her short dream of joy. Oh, why were men made thus ? Then,

with sudden weakness, for of all women she was the most womanly, she sank on the grass with her head on a green bank, and wept passionately.

For a few moments Alan gazed at her almost brutally, savagely in the fierceness of the passion she would not requite. He was reviewing the past and the future, then her tears, so pure and so true they were, reached his ear and his heart, and he threw himself on his knees beside her.

“Opalia, my sweet, sweet little one, do not cry. Forgive me, forgive. Blame your own beauty, do not blame me. Never, never, never again will I behave like a brute. Oh, tell me that you forgive me, that you don't quite hate me.”

“It isn't that,” said Opalia, when her tears had subsided, “it is only that if the sacrifice is so great, I must not marry you. It would be cruel.”

The voice was so sweet, so sad, so resigned, it made his heart ache.

“My sweet angel,” he answered, “to live and die by your side would be enough happiness for any man.”

“But, Alan,” she said, presently, “supposing you should forget your promise to me again.”

“Never, never again shall you be frightened by me, little one; say that you trust me.”

“Yes, I trust you,” she said; but there was a doubtful ring in her voice, as of one who regrets a step once taken.

That night when she went to bed, she said to herself,—

“Yet I am glad that he loves me in that way, and I could not give him up now.”

So they were married in the little village church, with only her mother as a witness, and the sexton and a few idlers from the

village, and later on they started for Paris, on their road to Italy, the country of artists and lovers.

Alan had made her many presents, for as a successful artist, with private means of his own besides, there was no reason why he should not at least indulge in the few pleasures allowed him by matrimony, but as they were driving from the Gare du Nord to their hotel, after musing some time in silence, he suddenly stopped the *fiacre* at the door of a jeweller's shop, and without explaining his purpose or asking her to alight, he sprang out and went into the shop. At the end of a few moments he came back with a small parcel.

Opalia smiled to herself.

“Another surprise, how good he is to me!” she murmured to herself, but apparently unconscious of his action, she made

some remark about the town. Paris with its sparkling streets and lively, pleasure-seeking throng delighted her.

At the hotel came the first of what Alan had seen would be a series of hitches.

“Monsieur desire une chambre à deux lits?” asked the landlady, with that want of delicacy or prejudice that the nation displays on these occasions. Opalia turned away and Alan hoped she had not heard. He would have to arrange this afterwards.

“Yes, no,” he answered vaguely; “let us have a room to dine in, we will settle that afterwards.”

For an instant, there was the Englishman’s resentment at any complication, anything unconventional, a slight irritation that Opalia should have placed him in this situation.

With the tact that redeems the want of

delicacy in the French, the landlady replied,—

“Oui, oui, nous mettrons les bagages de Monsieur et Madame pour le moment au numero quarante sept puis Monsieur choisira.”

How he blessed that Frenchwoman ! At dinner, Opalia was lively and playful, delighted with Paris, with the new life, with the devotion of her lover, who was perfect as a lover.

Champagne, that great mover of men's actions and thoughts, loosed Opalia's tongue, she was more affectionate, more frank, more brilliant than she had ever been. She unfolded her thoughts, her hopes, her wishes to him. Then they sat at the window while he smoked his cigarette. Presently he knelt by her side and kissed her.

“Now, little one,” he said, “you are in

my power, the law is on my side, and all my promises are scattered to the winds."

With a look of terror, she rose from her chair.

"Alan," she almost shrieked, "what are you saying?"

He rose too and laughed.

"You silly little woman," he said, "I was only teasing you. Where is your trust? Of course it shall all be as you wish," but he hardly knew if he had meant the words or not. But she was still quivering from head to foot, and as she leant out in the darkness, by the light of the lamps he could see two tears glistening in her eyes. Gently, with reverence, he placed his arm round her waist. "How could you doubt me, darling?" he said. "What a brute you must think me. May I not even joke with you?"

"Not about that," she said gently.

And he, kissing the tears, answered,—

“ Very well, then, never again. Now kiss me, and tell me you trust me. Look up and say, ‘ Alan, I trust you with my whole life ! ’ ”

“ Alan, I trust you with my whole life,” she repeated softly. Then she added, “ I trust you so much that I want you to come to my room and help me to un—” dress she was going to say, and she held her breath at the beginning of the word, then she added—“ pack.”

Arm-in-arm they went up the stairs to the floor on which was “ *numero quarante sept.* ”

On the threshold of the door Alan stopped.

How different it might have been ; but he must steel himself to the future, and he entered her room as a devotee steps up to the altar rails.

With pretty playful ways she made him

unpack her things, and help her to put away her pretty girlish garments, little thinking of the volcano in his bosom, or, if she imagined it for a moment, treading ruthlessly upon it in order to quench its flames and to complete her plan.

They had arrived late, dined late, and talked late, and the clock struck twelve as they finished their task.

“Heavens, how late!” she exclaimed.

“By George, I must go and get another room,” said he.

Opalia blushed.

He was silent a moment, hoping that she would say one word to keep him by her side.

“Good-night, then, darling,” she said, and lifted her lips to his.

His kiss was very light, because he could not trust himself, and she felt disappointed, she knew not why.

"Will you be near somewhere?" she asked, hesitatingly, and coming close to him.

"Next door," he answered stiffly, and walked to the door. She stood looking after him, an infinite longing in her eyes. Then he turned back, then, remembering something suddenly, he felt in his pockets, then he took out a leather case and opened it. An exquisite string of pearls lay gleaming white on their red velvet couch.

"Undo your dress," he said, and obediently and trusting she bared her throat.

With quivering hands he clasped the pearls around her neck.

"Not another present," she murmured; "you have given me so many."

"This one," he said, "is to seal a contract between us. It occurred to me, darling, that if ever you changed your

mind it would be difficult for you to tell me so. We might live on for years and you might have other thoughts perhaps one day."

He stopped, but she did not help him.

"Anyhow," he went on, "while those pearls are round your neck I shall remember my promise, I shall know that you still hold me to it. If ever you change your mind you have only to send me that necklace of pearls, and wherever I am I will come, I will be at your feet—and remember, darling, that I shall live in hopes of one day receiving that necklace."

The thought was so exquisitely delicate, so tender, the tone so humble, that she had not the heart to tell him that could never be. Oh, how she wished it could be!

She laid her head on his breast, and he kissed her fair hair lightly and left the

room. When he had gone she heaved a deep, deep sigh, and in the midst of her happiness the loneliness seemed more than she could bear.

This was Opalia's wedding night !

CHAPTER VII.

IT cannot be said that Alan was anything but happy during those first weeks of married life. There were little hitches now and then, little incidents that came now and then to remind them that things were unusual. There were moments when Alan felt that the sacrifice was a great one, but Opalia was so full of tact that even when not able to arrest these catastrophes she at least diverted them and put matters straight with wonderful facility. She was wonderfully sweet-tempered, and very intelligent and observant, and to two people of culture the situation had its charm and even its romance.

To be travelling about with a young girl whom by human law you have complete power over, but who has made a contract with you which binds you to treat her as if she were the merest stranger; above all, to be a young man of passionate and ardent nature and to be daily in the society of a most beautiful woman, very little over twenty;—who in their wildest dreams could imagine a situation more romantic, especially when both love each other passionately?

There were little episodes that saddened her—that maddened him. Sometimes, when they were sitting out on some marble piazza in the starlight, she would kneel by his side and lay her head on his lap, and ask him to fondle her as a child might do. He would kiss her passionately on the neck where the tiny fair hairs grew in ringlets—then he would push her

from him almost angrily, and leave her kneeling there. One evening, they were standing together at the window of an hotel in Florence, and she came to the window and leant against him as they looked out together ; then she slid her arm into his with a favourite movement.

“ Alan, I do love you so,” she said.

“ Then why, why do you treat me so ? ” he asked her. “ I believe your object is to tantalize me, to make me adore you so that you bring me to the verge of distraction.”

Once she fell ill, with a slightly feverish attack. He nursed her as long as she was ill, but the day she grew better he did not come near her. She sent for him at last. With his face close to hers on the pillow, he explained to her that either they must live as husband and wife, or they must be as strangers to each other.

"Is all this necessary?" he asked her despairingly. "Can we not be as others are?"

Then, with her two deep eyes looking at him with depths in them like a well, she answered, as a question,—

"And my convictions?"

Oh, those tiresome convictions. How terrible it is when a woman begins to think differently to others, or to have a mind at all! he thought. Yet he realized that half her charm lay in her earnestness, half the beauty of his honeymoon lay in the mysterious attitude of the bride. The strange union of love and the absolute absence of passion, yet with an under-current of extraordinary possibilities.

What saved the situation was his being a painter. The voyage to Italy sufficed him. What is the mystic poetry of Italy? Its complete harmony, perhaps. There is

no clashing 'twixt the work of God and the work of man. The lovely vegetation and the flowers, the graceful beauty of the peasantry, the blue sky and the glorious climate, all are enhanced, or lived up to as it were by the work of man. Each church tower and triangle, each gateway or fountain, each bridge or corner-stone, show some beautiful handiwork that is in keeping with the rest. The mind, the sensual artistic spirit is satisfied in every detail. The hills and valleys present a wholesale beauty, the tiny gardens and corners of roads the retail beauty, that goes to form a gigantic whole.

They swept from Florence to Rome, from Rome to Sienna, from Sienna to Milan and Naples and Venice, and then back again to Florence.

They spent whole days in the galleries and whole evenings in the Campagna—

that beautiful Tuscan Campagna which is like all the pictures one has ever seen, yet more beautiful. One wonders why the whole world does not desert the rest of the world and flock to Italy, if only to die, as the llamas flock to the llama valley in Peru, where shepherds find their mouldering bones beneath the bushes. But so it is in life—all the loveliest corners in the world are deserted, and the man who worships nature most finds himself by some strange fate with a thick wall opposite and a red brick church at the back. To think of all the wasted loneliness in the world: the flowers one has not picked; the sunsets one has not seen. The happiest man on earth is a gardener, for nothing in nature escapes him. The dullest life on earth, that of the man who comes to wind the clocks. He is hardly a human being: a stranger

who enters your drawing-room and your bedroom ; whom you find ready to obey your wishes, yet who creates neither emotion nor surprise ; and who vanishes again to perform the same colourless office in your neighbour's house.

Alan was surprised at the enthusiastic and artistic spirit he found in his wife. The passion for nature and art, the adoration of the beautiful, her happy recklessness and keen enjoyment. It argued well for that future which, without his knowing it, was the moment he longed for ; and it seemed strangely out of keeping with the attitude she had assumed.

Once, while weary with pleasure, satiated with beautiful sights, they sat down wearily on a bank in the gloaming of an Italian summer evening, watching the fireflies dancing to and fro, and listening to the croaking of the frogs in the distance, he

said to her, in tones that were full of passion yet without entreaty,—

“How is it that you combine so much passion with your coldness?”

“Oh, Alan, I am not cold, my heart is as warm as the sun has been to-day; and I love everything—God first,” she said reverently, “and then you, and then all the things you love, music and painting and flowers, and all these lovely things. There is so much to love, so much to do.”

As she said “God first” Alan felt a chill—there is jealousy in the heart of man, even of God that made him. Men and women who love, would have the being they love, love them more than God. Man-like, all seemed wasted without that one culminating madness of passion.

To Alan, living with his wife was like a perpetual worship in church before a beautiful shrine with an immaculate

Madonna. A Madonna without the Infant Jesus. His thought expressed it, only in words.

“I always thought,” he said, “that the greatest emotion of a woman’s heart was the love of children ; and you never talk of this.”

“Alan,” she said reproachfully, as if he were about to break his contract, and she wished to stop him on the threshold ; then she went on in another tone,—

“No, Alan, that is the mistake—people have associated certain ideas of their own with others for no reason. Men speak of a bridal night as a thing of joy, an enticing poetic delight, to a woman, when it is perhaps the most terrible night of her life. Men speak of the beauty of a mother’s love, of the wonderful tie between mother and children, the loveliness of the relationship, forgetting the horrors that accompany it and precede it. The unloveliness of all

the preliminaries. If children were found, as the fairy tales and the old nursery tales say, under a cabbage, or were brought to their mother's arms over hill and dale down from the stars by a stork, then indeed it would be a joy. But is not that rather overrated? Is the child worth all the mother goes through? Is there any poetry in its birth?"

"Then do you not love children?" said Alan, almost sadly.

"Other people's children, yes," she said, and rose as if to stop the conversation.

Alan followed her sadly into the garden of their villa. He let her go into the house alone, saw her take an oil lamp from the hands of one of the peasant women, and saw the light reappear at different windows as she walked along the cool mysterious passages. Then he saw it at the window of her room, that sanctuary

where he had every right to be, yet which every sense of honour exiled him from as the veriest stranger.

Alan wandered up and down the garden musing, wondering at the mysterious gift of passion given to men. Wondering why life seemed so colourless without it—why its power was so great? Here was a night divine, a country which was the very embodiment of poetry, the sweetest scent of flowers was wafted at every movement towards him—he had the companionship of one of the loveliest and most beautiful women it was possible to meet, yet he was not satisfied. For an instant life seemed intolerable, it could not go on, he said.

Could it be possible, he wondered, that passion was the greatest temptation on earth ; that no man could be perfect who did not combat it as the giants in mythology wrestled with dragons ? Were

all passionate women emissaries of the Evil One? With a shudder he thought of that interview with Lady Morris.

“ Bah ! ” he said to himself, “ am I to turn into a sort of Jack the Ripper—an hater of women, a stern Benedict who speaks harshly to women for fear of their subtle power overcoming him? Is every woman a Delilah who weaves a web of strange glamour in order to gain ascendency over you? who morally lulls you to sleep in order to shear the locks of your manly strength ? ”

At that moment Opalia flitted past her window, and her form stood against the window-blind.

“ Oh, sweet one,” he said stretching forth his arms to her window, “ why, why should we be different to others? What is this strange fate? How will it end? ” Sadly he entered the dark villa, and went

to his lonely room. But Opalia, struck with the beauty of the night, threw open her shutters and listened to the nightingales. Instinctively the words rose to her lips of Gounod's "Romeo and Juliette,"—

*"Non non ce n'est pas le jour, ce n'est pas l'alouette,
C'est le rossignol qui chante ses amours."*

She would have been more than a woman, or less, if the remembrance of those words in Melba's voice had not brought back the scene of the bridal night. Yes, if it were only right, what mad joy it would be, that glorious night in Alan's arms. The voice of the nightingale telling the advance of dawn, and dawn finding her still in the arms of her lover.

She leant her head on her arms on the window-sill, and wept as if her heart would break, for the love that was so close to her, yet which she must not have.

Had Alan arrived then, his dearest hopes would have been realized.

It is one's friends—or perhaps one ought to say one's acquaintances—that upset one's life most of all. Two people may be living together perfectly happily, till some disquieting word is dropped, some suggestion made, some expression cast that changes the current of one's life. One appears not to notice it, one tries to say that one does not mind; but all life is spoilt by it; without one's noticing it, it colours one's life. One acts up to that remark. One's life and energies are employed to combat it; to show a denial of it, one exaggerates the contradiction. We are called stingy—we lavish presents on the servants of the one who has said it. We are called extravagant—we pass by the house of the one who has called us so in a penny 'bus, we go to their smartest party

in our dowdiest dress. We are supposed to neglect our children, henceforward we drive them about with us everywhere. So it was with Opalia. If she could have lived alone in a wilderness, she would have continued being happy, and Alan would have grown resigned.

They returned to their lovely house at Ranelagh, with the marble pillars and tessellated hall, with great tiger-skins that reminded one of a picture of Alma Tadema. Here Alan had prepared her chamber during her absence. A little suite of rooms he had never used had been fitted up for her. Her drawing-room was hung with yellow Venetian brocades—these rooms, like the very altar of a much loved saint, had everything that was beautiful. He had thought out in his artistic spirit, coupled with his love, what would suit the purity of her beauty best, and he had

employed a very clever artistic workman to carry it out. The three rooms represented the three rooms of an old-fashioned cottage. Somewhere an old oak cottage-door, with a latch and bobbin, had been picked up. The windows were latticed, and yellow roses and jessamine had been planted round them. By the ingle nook stood a spinning-wheel, and a frill of chintz adorned the high chimney-piece ; white dimity curtains adorned the windows and the tiny couch. But far away on the other side was a stately nuptial chamber, where the great oaken four-poster was hung with costly satin. He knew not why he had ordered this, whether it was to deceive himself, or others, or the outcome of some deep hope.

“ How lovely ! ” said Opalia, drawing a deep breath. “ How well you understand me ! ” she said, turning to Alan ; and her

voice had half an apology, half a regret, but was full of gratitude.

Their first dinner together in their own house was bright and cheery and Opalia was full of fun. The only thing that troubled Alan now and then was a feeling of annoyance that Lady Morris should ever have crossed that threshold, that there should have been a desecration of that shrine; for men cease to pity when they cease to love, and no man is more bitter, more callous, more heartless than the man who loves again, in the treatment of the old love. He is even angry if she does not help him to rhapsodize over the new one.

One of the secrets of Opalia's happiness was, for the moment, the success of her revolt. She had accomplished her plan, she had attained her desire. She had shown the true vocation of woman. She

had found a man who realized at last woman's true position—that of a companion, a soother, but one who has to live out her own life without being bound by the horrible bestial ties that degraded other women. It was glorious to be the first really emancipated woman, and it was glorious to think she had achieved this by a conquest of self and steadfastness of purpose. Even her own mother was obliged to own that they were happy, and marvelled at it.

Alan, reinstated in his old rooms with his old occupations, seemed more resigned than before. He had returned full of fresh ideas, brought back from Italy. His eye was full of glorious Venetian colouring, pinks and lilacs, yellows and greens; all these were mingled and his ideal was titian-red hair. At first he made Opalia sit in a thousand ways: Opalia, as Rosalind,

Marguerite, the Virgin Mary. She represented a thousand embodiments. Then came the first shock, which was not a shock, but a mere disquietude. But it epoched the end of the honeymoon.

Who is the woman who said, "I knew that my honeymoon was at an end the first time I had to put down my empty coffee-cup myself"?

It was one morning when Alan tossed a letter across to her from a lady, asking him to paint her daughter.

"Have I time to embark on that?" he asked her, carelessly folding up another letter as he spoke and placing it in his breast-pocket.

She had never quite realized that he was a professional portrait-painter; that the greater part of his means was derived from his painting; that the beautiful home, the exquisite presents he gave her, were bought

with the price of his brains and his genius. Yes, it must be so ; henceforward whole mornings, whole days would go with other interests apart from hers. Strange women, models and great ladies would invade the cool studio, and she would have to stand back and watch it all in silence. There was no jealousy as yet in her thoughts—she was too sure of Alan's love for that—but there was a sigh of regret that all was over. It was the end of a dream, the beginning of real life. Henceforward there would be duties to perform. She must take up her household duties, her social position ; he must resume his work.

The letter he had hidden from her, not from deceit, but to save her pain, to save inquiries, was from Lady Morris. “I hear that you have returned—I hope you are happy. Can you find time to finish the portrait? or is the church

door locked to all except the Madonna wife?"

The tone wounded him. He had hoped that his marriage would sever him from her for ever ; yet, manlike, he was flattered at her insistence, at her remembrance of him. For days he did not answer her letter, then once more she wrote in the imperious way he knew so well—the grande dame to the man beneath her—the "painter-man" who has to earn his money :

"DEAR MR. D'ARCY,—Might I ask you if you received a letter from me asking if it would be convenient for you to finish my portrait? My husband is anxious to have it finished as soon as possible.

"Yours truly,

"I. MORRIS."

To this he answered curtly that he had just returned from abroad, and had a great

many pictures to paint. Would she mind waiting a little while ? he would write again, etc. To this he received a card, unsigned, but it was written in her handwriting,—

“ I have married a wife, therefore I cannot paint.”

All these were the first rumblings of thunder that threatened to break over Opalia's head.

The greatest conception of happiness is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before Satan entered it. Two people allowed to be happy in their own way without the interference of outsiders.

It is humanity that ruins humanity. For one moment he longed to show this to Opalia, to rouse her jealousy, to goad her into surrender for fear of losing him ; but he dismissed this as unworthy of himself, cruel to her, and a distinct breach of the contract.

One evening he said to her, laughing and touching the pearls on her throat,—

“Are you not afraid that if these do not come off soon I shall fall in love with someone else?”

She was sitting on the ground with her head on his knees. She did not answer, but when he looked into her face he saw her eyes were full of tears.

“What a brute I am,” he said. “No, darling, I could never love anyone else.”

Once they discussed the position, and, with her love of dissection, her wish to sift the truth to the bottom, to hear the worst, if worst there was, with a beating heart and anguish in her voice, she asked,—

“Alan, do men love women less who will not—will not——” She did not know

how to put it, "who will not do all they wish?"

Alan paused before answering. So much depended on his answer, yet he did not wish to wound her.

"If you ask me candidly," he said, "I think 'yes,' generally," he added. "It is extraordinary," he said, "but man's whole life depends on the surrender of the woman he loves. He cannot, at least he finds it difficult, to believe that she loves him completely without it. I own that it is degrading, that it proves how utterly influenced we are by women, how years of education, civilization and art have not been able to stamp out the original, but I think that it is so. Man loves a woman more after her surrender than before."

"Then, Alan," she asked, with halting voice, her heart standing still, "do

you love me less because of this contract?"

"No, my sweet one, not less; but, if possible, I could love you ten thousand times more."

Once more faint hope returned to him, and she went to bed with a vague distress.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHE could never have told you where the rift began. It was a general sense of an unnatural position—a drifting away from Alan, a perpetual feeling of not pleasing him, of not satisfying him, a reticence of expression of thoughts. Little jokes, little *risqué* stories he heard, and which other men repeat to their wives and laugh over, he kept to himself, and while conscious that the hearing of them would wound her, she still felt that the not hearing left unexplored corners of his heart, and gave him links of friendship with other more responsive souls.

It is marvellous how little there is left to

talk about as the world is now, if you expunge the relations of the sexes. The *double-entente*, the *risqué* stories, the intrigues, the *liaisons* of society, the loves. Half the charm to most young girls of early married life is the close acquaintance with the dark stories of immorality which have been kept from them before their marriage, the reading of books that were forbidden and which touch on these things; and even the vicar's wife would be nowhere if there were not some poor unfortunate stray lamb in the village, some thrilling story of seduction to relate to her husband or the squire's wife, and it is marvellous how great an interest religious, or so-called religious, women take in fallen women, and love providing homes and comforts for them if they are of the poorer class, though they would shrink from associating with such a woman

in their own circle. Is the story true of the girl who did not know where to go to for help, and having tried everything honest, said to the clergyman who interrogated her,—

“You ain’t got a chance, sir, of the ladies a-doing anything for you unless you’ve been wrong.”

At first Opalia tried to be a companion to Alan, but it is not every man who requires a companion. Alan had his art and his occupations. There were still delightful evenings when they talked for long hours, or went to plays, or to hear good music, or went to parties or entertained his friends or hers, and these would say: “How successful the marriage was!” Plato was right after all. Such a thing is possible where both were cultivated, and understood the position. Alan was beginning to understand the position

perfectly. There were moments still when he cast himself on his knees beside her, when he asked her in passionate tones if she would never love him as he wished to be loved ; but habit now made it easier each time for her to resist, and these moments grew less frequent, and yet she missed them and was beginning to realize that those were the moments she had lived for, and that the want of them made her life empty. Each resistance hardened his heart still more—she was cold, cruel, heartless, selfish. Sometimes he was on the point of upbraiding her. Sometimes he would leave her after dinner, and go and smoke alone and sketch by gas-light in his studio. Sometimes she would sit silently musing or working. Sometimes the silence, the solitude, was too horrible, and she would go to the studio, and with her arms round his neck, say,—

"Alan, don't you care to be with me any more? Is it all over?" And this irritated him.

Sometimes, when she looked very beautiful, he would say,—

"It is impossible for a man loving a woman as I do you, to live by the side of a woman like you as I do; you have asked too much." Then her heart thrilled with pleasure. At other times he would answer shortly,—

"I am very busy, I should prefer not to be disturbed," and she would slink away with a heart of lead. Then she realized what it was to have no sleeping babe to go and weep over. Yes, she had asked too much. She had tried too much. She had failed, and, worst of all, she had wrecked his happiness.

She had got over, with a great effort, the first feeling of jealousy when she saw him

sketch a half nude model in his studio. She was more jealous still when she found pretty sensual lady-visitors in smart gowns sitting for their portraits. She also got over the sensation of desolation when he asked her not to come in when he was painting visitors, as it was not the right thing, firstly; and secondly, she was so beautiful that it took off from the beauty of the sitter very often.

Her happiest moments were when he painted her. He painted her in every attitude, in every costume, and each movement, each turn of the head or arm revealed some new grace, and the only comfort of his soul was that a thing so beautiful belonged to him, at all events in name, and to her, the touch of his hand if he altered some lace about the throat or head-dress to suit his picture, gave her a thrill.

Once, in a fit of passionate jealousy or a supreme effort to please him to the extent of her powers, she offered to sit to him for the neck and shoulders and arms of a wood-nymph he was painting.

He hesitated a moment,—

“Would you really?” he asked, with a tone of passion. Then, alarmed already at her daring offer, fearful of its consequent results, tremulous lest she should have been either immodest or treacherous to her principles, or have given him hopes she did not mean to fulfil, she said hesitatingly,—

“Of course, you would not ask me to undress too much.”

With a sigh of impatience he answered,—

“Oh, thanks; it's all right; the model does very well; I won't trouble you, dear, you have lots to do.”

So it came about that she drifted out of his life. To make up for his disappointment, perhaps to keep himself from temptations, he worked early and late, and his work became each day more perfect, more celebrated ; sometimes painting things exquisite in their purity as he remembered Opalia, or terrible in their sensuality when he was angry with her.

Opalia, too, realized that for her too there must also be work. The Portuguese servant understood his master so well that he left very little or no trouble in the household arrangements, beyond a few social duties which she strove manfully to keep up for his sake, and lest the world said she had failed. She had no occupations, but those self-imposed ones which are a weariness to the flesh.

She would return, if Alan did not mind, to her work in the East End.

To her surprise, Alan consented with joy. The lovely unbending figure moving silently and sadly through the house was beginning to oppress him. She seemed a continual reproach, not only to him, but to all the character of man, and he knew that he was not making her happy. He was breaking the contract, not by insincerity or insistence, but by failing to keep up the tenor of their companionship, the ideal relations they had mapped out together during their engagement.

Everyone who had known her in the days of her old work noticed that she came back to it less decided in manner and with a certain diffidence, and she spoke neither of marriage nor giving in marriage, against it nor for it. In old days her crusade had been against the relations of the sexes ; she had tried to imbue others with her ideas of ideal purity—not the purity that

requires the sanctification of the marriage ceremony, but ideal, innate purity pervading life, married or single. Perhaps the greatest thrill of joy she had felt for months was at the evidently genuine welcome she received from her poor people in Whitechapel. It redeemed her in her own eyes, for the feeling that she was useless to Alan made her feel sometimes as if her very existence were a misfortune. She spoke still at her meetings of sacrifice, but it was the sacrifice of the whole of life, not of one principle, the sacrifice of happiness, to an ideal of conscience, but the sacrificing of self to save a mass.

There was a tinge of sadness in her voice and manner, and she could have laughed one day when she heard the voice of one of her audience, saying,—

“Cheer up, it can’t be so bad as all that.”

Yet her work sustained her and brought

forgetfulness, that clever mocking ape that deludes us into thinking we are happy. Yet her work took her still more away from Alan, for that moment when he might have called her and wanted her for something, she was absent, and with the cruelty of fate that comes to laugh at our woes, people pitied Alan for having a wife who preached in Whitechapel, when her whole soul and being were centred in the studio, and for very emptiness of heart she had gone to the poor people.

We must be very happy if we do not need sympathy, and a strange experience to Opalia was a note handed to her one day after one of her meetings. It ran thus,—

“ Forgive a stranger for addressing you, but your eyes speak from a world through which I have been. You, who preach, do you not need solace and comfort? If an

old woman with a sad, sad past can be of use to you, call one evening to see me, 80, Severn Square, Bayswater, and ask for Lady Meath."

It was a strange letter, and Opalia's first impulse was to answer it or to go and seek this woman. There is a moment of despair in young women when they would rush to a beggar woman for sympathy if they thought she would understand. Then the impossibility of revealing her life to a stranger, a feeling of loyalty to Alan, prevented her. She locked the letter away when she returned home, but did not answer it.

So all life turns on passion, and Opalia's life was wrecked for the want of it.

What Opalia realized most woefully of all was the utter absence of real religious support; there is no real link between the upper classes and their clergy: the poor have a refuge for every woe; the

terrible griefs of the rich must all be locked up in their own hearts. Sometimes she wished she were a Roman Catholic and had a Father Confessor. The intense relief of unburdening this sorrow, of obtaining advice, but she knew that no advice could reach her case. The grief of Opalia was Opalia's grief, and none could assuage it. Who—who could grasp the delicacy of the situation? She could almost hear the monotonous voice of Mr. Lister, the Vicar of St. Eustace, who had married twice, each time the daughter of some noble house and had ten children, telling her in a suave voice that she could not escape from her duties as a wife, etc., etc.

Great griefs no one can reach. The wine-press is trodden alone by each human being, and he performs the greatest act of charity who can come forth and

truly sympathize with a grief that is not his own.

There should be a public sympathizer, paid by Government, without any ties or woes or griefs or joys of his own, but who is always studying those of others.

A woman generally succeeds in doing all she means to do, and if she does not carry through her scheme, it is invariably because she has abandoned her cause and not that she has failed.

Lady Morris had always meant to make Alan her lover, there was double sweetness in doing it now he had a wife.

She had ceased writing to him, but she made use of her poor, blind, fatuous husband to create the act of his own undoing. She complained of Alan's conduct to him, thus killing two birds with one stone, putting him completely off the scent and bringing her lover to her feet.

“Really, George,” she said, one morning, “it is too bad of that Mr. D’Arcy never sending for me to finish my picture. I really think you had better send for him or write to him about it. I suppose he thinks that now that he has become a great painter and does not need helping he will do just what he pleases. Not very flattering!”

The subtle passion did its work, for there is a feeling stronger than death in the heart of an Englishman: first, that he will not be done; secondly, that he is as good as his neighbour. It is this feeling that makes England what it is; and the crowds assembled outside the Houses of Royalties are not there to see what Royalty is like, but to see if they are so different after all to themselves.

A note reached Allan which would have amused him had he not realized its origin.

“ DEAR SIR,—As it is some time since Lady Morris has heard from you, and as she has repeatedly written to know when it would be convenient to you to give her a sitting, I must request that you either complete the picture at once or write and tell me that you do not wish to, in which case I will write to Mr. Millais and ask him to do it.

“ I am, sir,

“ Faithfully yours,

“ MORRIS.”

To such a letter from anyone else Alan would have answered that he regretted that he had not time to finish the picture and would be dictated to by no one, but vanity, coupled with curiosity and the longing for adventure which is innate in all humanity, and in young men especially and in artists in particular, made him hesitate before

sending the answer. Yet to allow Lady Morris to come to the house without telling Opalia the circumstances, seemed like treachery, and loyalty towards her was perhaps the strongest feeling he had left.

It was only ten o'clock, and he knew he should find her outside in the garden, feeding her pets, for it is characteristic of pure minds that they revel in small homely details, not because of smallness of intellect, but because such things have depths unknown which the worldly frivolous mind has no time to fathom.

He found her on the terrace, a large St. Bernard dog by her side and a bowl in her hands, round which some hungry ring-doves were clustering. The sun lay straight on her golden hair and pure brow. She looked the embodiment of purity. Ah! if this woman only loved him as he wished to be loved, how easy it would be. But, alas!

good women stand a very poor chance against bad women.

“Opalia,” he said, “I want to speak to you.” He handed her the letter. She placed the bowl on the edge of the parapet, and the doves fluttered around her and finally flew back to the bowl of meal.

Then she took the letter.

“Well, darling,” she said, “why do you show it to me? Can’t you arrange to finish this picture? This man Morris, whoever he is, seems angry; surely it would be better not to lose——”

“Yes, yes,” he said, “but that is not the point.” How should he put it to her? Now that he thought of it, he could not betray the other woman.

“I wanted to tell you, Opalia, that this woman I think—of course, I have no reason to think so—but I fancy that this woman once cared about me. It seems very con-

ceited, of course. I can't be sure, but I wondered if you would dislike her coming here."

Her heart beat, but with strange nobility she answered,—

"What does that matter?" Then, with playfulness she added,—

"Of course, lots of women have cared for you, Alan."

"But I don't have them here," he answered, almost hoping to make her jealous.

"You are welcome to," she said, "for I trust you implicitly. Besides, Alan, you love me, so how can any other woman come between us?"

Yet her heart sank as she saw he was slipping from her. She felt it somehow. Then she said, with a voice that stifled back tears and a lump in her throat,—

"You never cared for this woman, did you, Alan?"

“No, never,” he answered fervently, for here he could speak the truth.

“And, Alan,” she went on, “you are not afraid, are you, of this woman coming, be. . . . I mean, doing us any harm, are you?”

Then before he could answer, for he was long in answering, she said,—

“No, Alan, let her come, let her see how we love each other;” then, almost with a laugh, for she had the fine temper high, loyal spirits have, she added,—

“If your love is worth anything, Alan, no woman can make any difference; by all means let her come; see, I will write the letter myself.”

So it came about that Lady Morris came to be painted, between three and six, twice a week, Mondays and Thursdays, and the first time she came Opalia received her with gentleness and grace, with a tinge of

pride and with pity that she should love Alan in vain.

This event precipitated events, the under-currents which had been swelling so long burst forth into a torrent, and the vague misery came to an end, and was exchanged for a certain definable sorrow which it was easier to bear.

It was very late one evening when Opalia returned home from a meeting in Whitechapel. The season was almost at an end, there was that hot dragging-on feeling of later summer in town, the smell of mud, of horses' feet, the dusty look of the leaves in the park, the untidy look of all those who had been so smart and brushed up in the height of the season. Yet there is a poetry in London at the end of July, all its own! People who have only six square feet of garden sit out, and have tea on their leads and water

geraniums and imagine that they are in the country.

Opalia had that strange rapt look clever people and truly religious people have when they have been hard at work, a look of virtue given forth, a face that shines like Moses', "as if it had communed with God." The summer evening, the success of her meeting, the deep feeling of sympathy with a suffering world, the strange exultation which accompanies all efforts for good, all this made her mood subdued, yet happy with the chastened happiness born of suffering, which so few know, the dead calm that absolute faith brings. Fresh with the evening perfumes on her brow and lips, she entered the house with her latch-key. All was still dark, servants never hit on the right moment between lighting the lights too soon or leaving one in utter darkness. Half groping, she placed the

books she had with her on the table in a recess underneath the staircase. Still in the darkness she loosened the veil that stifled her. While she did it, she heard her husband's step descending the stairs and the rustle of a silk petticoat. Her heart stood still within, with a half-formed dread; she could not move.

The figures descended the staircase close together; too close, she thought. They crossed the hall, without seeing her. How distant she felt from her husband, like one who has no right to be there; as if she saw from her coffin her husband with a new wife. Her head swam, yet each nerve, each sense was kept alive by the necessity to grasp the situation. It was not spying, but simply the impossibility of changing her position. Somehow now she felt that she had dreaded this. Breathless she listened.

"*Au revoir, mon ami,*" said the woman coquettishly, yet with infinite tenderness.

"Good-bye, my darling; to-morrow without fail; don't forget."

"Forget!" Then in the darkness their lips met.

It was as if her soul had escaped her and only the body of Opalia stood still by the table in the recess. She heard the Portuguese servant come across from the offices to light the hall-lamp, that pretty, quaint old Roman lamp they had picked up together in Italy. She heard Alan ask if she had come in, then, as the light flamed up, Alan saw her standing by the table, an awful distress on her lovely face, agony in her eyes like those of a dog whose master turns it away from the door.

"Opalia!" There was as much agony in his voice as there was grief in her heart.

Remorse that this sweet woman should have been exposed to such a sight, and despair at his own want of courage. Yes, through it all she felt that she was his only love, that he was only going through a transitory passion, a temptation from which it behoved her to save him. She did not speak, but as she walked to the stairs she tottered so that he rushed to her side.

She threw up her head with a gesture that repelled him, but she did not speak, her heart was burning with a horrible sense of injustice, a giving away of life, of the world, of everything, a crumbling away of her own heart and soul, like one who has leaned his hand on an old window-sill and it gives way.

“ Forgive me, forgive me, Opalia ! ” was all he said. Still she did not answer, no words could express what she felt. There was more than the ordinary grief of the

woman who has been deceived, the sense of failure, the horrible treachery, the disappointment, the coming face to face with anything so horribly commonplace as an unfaithful husband. Ah! and her love, how she had loved him, how she would love him again, for love only stood still to give way to burning anger and passion, but because she would not give way to her passion all this was of no avail. She mourned for women.

Love had passed out of that house when passion entered it. The snake had entered her Garden of Eden. And all the impotence of humanity and of women in particular came with sullen rage to swell the tumult of feelings in her heart.

All that night she lay wakeful on her bed. What could she do? Where should she go? For she could not stay with Alan now, nor did he need her. Her ideal

was dead, the dream dreamt out. In one moment she ceased to be a child. The husband who should have been her support was the one against whom she must now defend herself. Where should she go? What line could she take? To go to her mother would be unbearable. It would be the "I told you so," that would make it impossible.

Thought has its own way of going round and round, forming itself into plots and plans of action. It has its own clock-work that strikes the rhythm of time and brings into measure each flight of fancy. Despair, almost a despair that contemplates suicide, first seized her, then came deep sadness, then, worst of all, the feeling of degradation that a woman can only enslave a man through his passions. Yes, that was the most heartrending feeling of all. She had loved him, oh, so

dearly ! she had been so tender, so gentle, so submissive, so unselfish. She was so beautiful ; yes, she knew that too, now, from the golden hair that rippled like that of the Venus of Milo on her head to the pink soles of her arched feet. Everything was perfect that could move the lover's heart and the painter's fancy. She had talents and culture and riches, her voice was sweet, and she had never worried him or contradicted him. Yet all this was as nothing compared to the great gift Lady Morris was about to bestow. Surely, if this was woman's state in the nineteenth century, what difference between this and the Eastern beauty in the harem of a Moslem potentate ? Even now she knew that she had only to seek him, to surrender ; one word would bring Alan, not only passionately loving, but full of penitence to her feet, but this word should

never be spoken. He had fallen from his pedestal—the man she had singled out as more worthy than other men, more full of tender love and sweet aiding chivalry ; the man who was to be the link between angels and mortals was but a man like others. Then a voice seemed to say in her ear, “ You can yet save him, he has only descended one step under great provocation, he loves you, and the one course you have is to surrender.” Oh, the idea was more distasteful than ever ; like a sensitive plant she shrank from the very thought of doing what Lady Morris would do, simply to save her husband’s soul. Must hers perish to save his from this ? For thus it would be to her, feeling as she did. Not even the purity of a passionate and unclouded love would come to sanctify such a surrender. From every point of view the situation was intolerable, and she

tossed and turned on her white bed that had pleased her so, till at last she fell asleep, only to dream that in an inexplicable kiss she had pardoned Alan, and that in his arms she had forgotten her griefs. It seemed so simple when she awoke, night had swept away the cobwebs of confusion. How easy to wander down to Alan's room and beseech him through his love to bid farewell to Lady Morris for ever! How easy the conquest would have been! How rich in joy the days that followed! All this Opalia realized, but to surrender now was impossible, and all she cast about in her mind was, "who to go to." Then the remembrance of that letter from Lady Neath came back to her. Yes, it had been sent her by a kind providence.

She was but a child, and though she dreaded confessing her griefs and her

husband's inconstancy, she had a child's longing to cry out her griefs. She would seek out this woman in the morning, and then she would find out some retreat amongst her poor Whitechapel people.

In the early morning, with a soul as grey as the clouds that hung above, and the shadows that stole across the garden, Opalia rose to put together a few things she loved. She looked across the garden. Towards the copper beeches, where they had so often had tea together, she saw the sun stealing cold and unsympathetic over the red wall, and when she realized that it was the last morning under Allan's roof she fairly broke down. Poor, little, disappointed child, that out of the pureness of its heart had tried to create a pure man and found him foul and bestial like all the rest. The grief of a woman who realizes the inferiority of women is like nothing else.

She descended to the studio. In the half shadows it looked more like a mortuary chamber than anything else. Figures of women lying recumbent in the windows, with pale lights of morning outlining them and giving them a strangely realistic appearance, faces grinned from obscure corners on the wall, and everywhere lay great white sheets or holland ones wrapping round lay figures or statues, or hanging over half-finished portraits. On the easel he had used that day stood the portrait of Lady Morris, not covered, for both the painter and the model had been too absorbed with themselves to cover it. It stood there in all its piquante beauty, and as with fierce wonder and jealousy she gazed at it she seemed to read her own undoing. Those laughing eyes, that sweet sensual mouth. That was the face men revelled in, the face that lived for men and

their smiles. That was a real woman who had no self except reflected through the man that loves her and whom she loves, a woman who only thinks the gown pretty which he has admired. In a fit of childish rage she took up a brush from her husband's palette and dashed it into a thick jet cream of paint and smeared it over the face, dashing out eyes and nose and rounded chin and each dark curl; then growing to like her task and with still madder jealousy, she took the palette knife and plunged it into eye and cheek and neck, till nothing remained. Oh, she knew now that when she had left never more would Lady Morris cross that threshold. If the two measured their strength, if she descended to use Lady Morris's weapons, she knew full well who would be the conqueror, and that thought was all that kept her from despair. Then, ashamed of

her anger, she flung herself down on the sofa and sobbed, mingled tears of lost childhood and age, and longing for the presence of Alan.

“Opalia!” It was Alan’s voice, for he too had not slept. “Opalia, my sweet, sweet darling! Can you ever forgive me?”

His voice was weary with the inward weeping of men who have no tears. His punishment was greater than he could bear. It was all the remorse of a man who has been cruel to a little child he loves, the penitence of a man who returns to the altar of a patron Saint. He had drifted into this flirtation, God knew how. She had pitied him, then appealed to his passions—passions that were always kept on tenter-hooks by Opalia and that are the curse of man. He cared no more for her than the door-mat that lay by his door, yet for the moment she had usurped all the

soft places where Opalia's image lay. Oh, the pain he must have caused his sweet pure wife. Surely a whole life of sacrifice could not suffice to atone for it. How he despised and hated himself! He had wandered about all night. He had heard Opalia go down to the studio. Never had their hearts been so close as in the grey of that late summer morning, when he leant over her in a passion of regret and hatred of self, and she lay weeping in his arms.

CHAPTER IX.

YET she left him like a child who has grown hysterical and cries for its mother, long after she presses it to her bosom, so Opalia, having made up her mind to fly for support and comfort to Lady Neath, could not resign herself to leaving matters as they were, and returning to her life with Alan as if nothing had happened. There was the consciousness of insult which must be resented which lies in all of us and women in particular. Then there was a new knowledge. She realized that men were not built the same as women, and that the only possible life between man and

woman was the recognized one. The question now was whether she should submit for the sake of retaining her husband's love, or whether she should leave him for ever. The problem was too great for her. Either way she could not see before her. In one moment to undo the cherished ideas of her life was as hard and repugnant to her as the idea of leaving Alan. She must think, perhaps in solitude and quiet some fresh idea might come to her. Perhaps this strange friend would solve the problem; anyhow for a time she must leave the house, she could never go in and out of the door without recalling that scene with Lady Morris.

Alan was wretched; he strove to paint and could not. He recognized in its fulness how coarse the nature of man is, how utterly unworthy to associate with the delicate nature of women, if that woman has

a brain and well-cultured intellect. He recognized that all the difficulties came from this inequality of nature, and that the only possible state in which man could be happy was while women were uneducated, and looked upon themselves only as the plaything of man—that the moment they come out of that state to one of independent thought and action, man's day was over. It was the natural consequence. There is not room for both. No world could be ruled by two governing powers, and that is practically the question now, or will be very shortly.

Upstairs he heard Opalia moving about, packing up little things she would take away with her, putting others away. He dared not ask her where she was going or what she meant to do. He had placed himself, he knew, outside the pale of her confidence. But there was an agony in

his heart lest she should leave him for ever. Yes, he felt that even as things had been, they were perfect compared to his present wretchedness, and the terror of solitude when Opalia had gone.

“Do not think me cruel, Alan, if I leave you for the present,” she said at parting. “Believe me, it is not from resentment or revenge, only that I must have a little quiet to think out the future.” She was sitting on a sofa while the Portuguese servant went for a cab.

“Do not think of the future,” said Alan passionately, “let us go back again to the past. Let it all be as it was, I am content, only promise me that you will come back.”

But she did not answer, her whole heart cried out against the parting. She wept for herself and him too, left to his solitude, but she would promise nothing. It might be she hoped not that she thought it best

to leave him for ever. She did not wish to seem hard, but he himself had so changed the position that she could not reorganize it. The past could never come back. There was too much uncertainty in the present. The future must be built up, and in that future she would study Alan's happiness so far as she could, consistently with her ideal. To succumb, in order to "keep Alan straight," as the vulgar expression has it, would be the very lowest surrender possible. It would mean two things, that at the very first moment that temptation and difficulty crossed the path of the immaculate life she had mapped out for herself and Alan she succumbed for the sake of peace, and also it would be lowering Alan for ever in her own eyes and his to recognize that she only kept him by her side by the common ties of passion, which keeps any man to any woman, anyhow, for

a time. No, such a surrender would be worse than any she had ever contemplated. So with dry eyes, but tears in his heart, he saw her depart, and she left him with a terrible uncertainty as to whether she would ever come back.

Five minutes after Opalia's departure the Portuguese, with a smirk on his face, announced "Lady Morris."

For two days she had been waiting for some letter or sign from him, he had never turned up at the assignation they had planned. She was wild with fury, and ready to explode a bomb-shell of abuse and bitter reproach, but something in his face stopped her. A smile of amusement almost, in the midst of his pain, crossed his face, as he thought of the picture. Then he decided to tell Lady Morris the story, and get rid of her for ever. His heart was closed to the image of any

woman but Opalia. He pointed to the easel and drew off the sheet that still covered it.

“What has happened?” she asked, horrified, dreading lest he himself had done it.

“My wife saw our farewell at the door the other day, and in an access of fury destroyed your picture. I am very sorry, Lady Morris, but it was excusable under the circumstances.”

“Then she knows she—?”

“My wife has left me,” said Alan with quiet dignity.

“She could not care for you, she never has, she doesn’t know what love is, she never was worthy of you. Oh, Alan, now we can be everything to each other. I will try and make up to you, comfort you. We—”

“You are very kind,” he interrupted

bitterly, "but alas! my wife was very dear to me, her going away has broken my heart, and no one, Lady Morris, not even you, can mend it."

He walked to the window and looked out with desolate eyes on the sunny garden, with the red wall and the copper beeches and the bed of tall lilies, where Opalia so often sauntered. He hoped she would go, and she did. Terrified at what she had done, at the look on his face, she rose and left the room silently, never to return.

When two hours later the Portuguese knocked discreetly at the door to announce luncheon, he was surprised at the anger with which his master flung open the door and asked him with an oath why he couldn't come in like a Christian instead of sneaking outside.

The Portuguese didn't know what he

had expected, but somehow he was disappointed.

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Lady Neath asked Opalia no questions. For years she had devoted herself not so much to the poor (at least not wholly to the poor) as to trying to soothe the griefs of humanity. She recognized that there are great untouchable sorrows that eat the sap away out of the life of many, and her object had been to try and assuage these. She knew Opalia well by reputation, she knew what the tenets of her life were, and she knew that there could be no happiness in such a marriage while the world was as it is. She too had had a wretched married life, married to a coarse drunken *roué* at eighteen; she had come out of it unembittered, but with a vast experience which she put at the disposal of humanity in general.

It was not till after dinner, that in the fulness of her desolation and loneliness she opened her heart to Lady Neath. She told her everything from her girlish career to her marriage, from the marriage to the hour she sought Lady Neath. She hid nothing. She was an absolutely truthful woman, and a woman without prejudices. She told the facts without any attempt at influencing her hearer, or any attempt at drawing sympathy to herself or excusing herself. She threw no blame on either Lady Morris or her husband. She ascribed all the difficulties to her ideas on the subject of marriage, and deplored that she had sacrificed the life of another in order to reach her own ideal; her pride and vanity had had a fall, now all she asked Lady Neath was how she could best save Alan pain.

“I am tired out,” she said, “and I have

come here merely not to give in from sheer fatigue."

Lady Neath's answer startled Opalia.

"My poor child," she said, "and all this time you have been making what to you seemed a sacrifice, but you have avoided the real sacrifice of women."

"What do you mean?" asked Opalia, bewildered.

"My dear child, the real sacrifice of women is giving themselves up to men, having children, etc. That is the sacrifice. You are escaping all the expiations, all the real sacrifices of womanhood. Listen!" she went on, "and hear my theory, then act as you will. Remember, I am an old woman and I have been through a good deal. First of all, I take the original old story of Adam and Eve—I know that it is only old 'frumps' like myself that believe in the story of Adam and Eve,

but I have no story to put in its place, I prefer to stick to that, it does quite well enough for me. Well, first of all God placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in a state of perfect bliss, which sufficed Adam, but apparently did not suffice Eve. She listened to Satan, and Satan, I take it, taught her the relations of the sexes."

Opalia almost laughed, yet she felt a sense of disappointment. This was not the solace she sought, but Lady Neath went on.

"Then as a punishment she was told that what she had done for Satan she must henceforth do for her husband. 'Thy desire shall be unto thy husband.' That was the curse, the compulsory imposition of what she had given freely to Satan. Next comes the expiation, the suffering of childbirth. Then out of pity

comes the beautiful compensation, a child, the proud possession of a child, which is nearest akin to the glory of creating, which assuages all pain, all sorrow, all sacrifice. The mad joy of one's first baby in one's arms is like nothing else on earth."

"But there is something degrading in the fact of being obliged to obey a man's will," faltered Opalia, moved against her will by the thoughts of maternity.

"There is," said Lady Neath, "but that is woman's curse; her compensation is the thought that she has saved a man from worse sins. God has made woman the keeper of man's soul. Till woman recognizes that her whole mission in life is the redemption of man's soul either by the education of the sons or by the winning of her husband,

there will be no peace, no happiness in the world."

"Then," said Opalia, breathless at theories that upset all hers, "you own that woman's position is an inferior one?"

"Decidedly inferior from the human point of view," said Lady Neath, "and far above, if looked upon as God's mission to woman, the expiation of woman's sin. 'Thou hast ruined man,' it was as if God said, 'thou shalt save him by thy sacrifice. I made thee equal, thou hast lowered thyself, take henceforward a lower place to redeem man.' Did not Christ take the lowest place of all to redeem humanity?"

This and much more Lady Neath said, till Opalia crept to bed, humbled, submissive, yet with a great joy in her heart that what Alan longed for, that what she

longed to give Alan was a far possibility. Now grew up a great fear lest Alan should no longer want her. It is wonderful how easily folks follow advice that is in accordance with their wishes.

After two or three days of peace and quiet, of continual advice from Lady Neath, of tenderness, of soothing and a thousand longings for Alan, mingled with a strange new jealousy lest Lady Morris should have gone to the studio, a small registered parcel went by post to Alan.

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And Alan, what had he suffered? His life was completely disjointed by the departure of Opalia. He could not paint, if he analyzed at the end of the day what he had done, he had done little else but saunter up and down the garden, up and down the house. He wondered, as we all wonder, why par-

ticular griefs, particular temptations come to us. Why, why should he have met a woman like Opalia, so absolutely seductive, yet so different to anything that could satisfy a man? His manhood prevented his for one moment ever imagining that God had intended him to be a shining light, an immaculate man. Unfortunately as the world is now, the light of ridicule shines over such a man rather than the glory of heavenly approbation. He realized now that his giving in to Opalia's wish had been merely a romantic desire to please her. He had grasped the fact that this was the only way to approach her, and he had been certain that she would ultimately give herself to him.

Alan had dined, the Portuguese servant had served him with sympathy and silence, bringing him his choicest fruit, pouring out his favourite wines, for something surely

was up, when the beautiful Senora would leave the house, and in his heart the Portuguese put it all down to Lady Morris.

But at eight the last post struck at the door. A small parcel was brought to Alan in the studio, where to cheat himself and the Portuguese he was trying to sketch by gas-light. How he trembled as he recognized Opalia's handwriting. He could not open the packet, for he felt sure of what it was.

“Casting pearls before swine,” were the words that rose in his mind.

Yes, there they lay, gleaming white—telling their own tale. Pure as the soul and the body of Opalia, clinging, supple, cold, yet priceless, they lay pathetic in their silence, yet impressive in their import.

It was the surrender of Opalia.

"Casting pearls before swine," those words came to him again and again.

The giving up of her little all to a man rather than not prove her love.

Alan bowed his head on his arm and wept like a little child over the story those pearls spoke to him.

Like a phoenix the realization of his wishes rose from the ashes of her ideals.

The wreck of a woman's ambition, the failure of her plans, the sacrifice of her purity lay speaking there.

It was like the realization of all hopes. When they come, they do not come as one wants them to come, they come with some bitterness, some drawback that mars the realization. The very presence of those pearls stamped him as a beast, marked his inferiority to the woman. He felt like a man who is elected to represent a borough where there is no contest.

Like a child he wept, wept bitterly and long till morning came, and soon after sunrise the Portuguese found him sleeping on the sofa in the studio with the case of pearls by his side.

CHAPTER X.

NEXT day Opalia returned. Returned meek and submissive, like a weaned child, with a terrible diffidence, a terrible sense of failure, a horrible uncertainty as to the meanings of Providence, an impossibility of explaining anything.

The morning after her surrender, when she woke, Alan had gone. On her table she found a letter :—

“ DARLING ANGEL,—I don’t know with what feelings you may wake up, whether my presence might be repugnant to you or not. I shall travel about, giving you my address every day, till you send for me.

If you are ever tempted to regret your return to me, let it be a source of comfort to you that you made me supremely happy.

"If you ever want me, one word will recall me. I thought it best to leave you absolutely uninfluenced."

It was many months before Opalia sent him that word. Then he received a telegram saying only the word,—

"Come."

After a night of anguish, when her firstborn was placed in her arms and Alan stooped to kiss her, she realized that all the degradation, all the expiation, all the suffering was wiped out, and that, in His infinite pity for the horrors of womanhood, God had provided a compensating joy, the exquisite, incomparable joy of maternity.

And Opalia rejoiced that He had.



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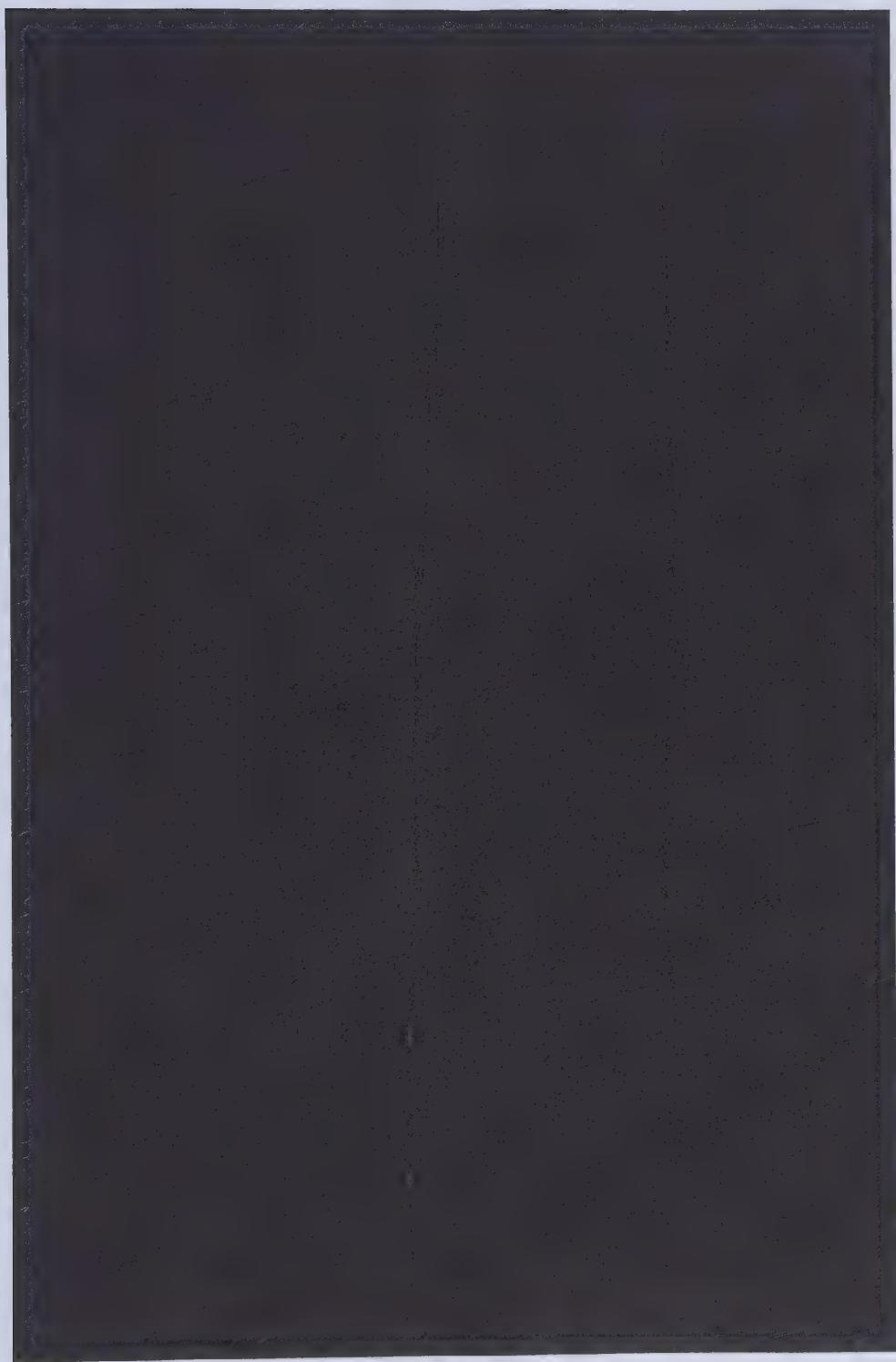
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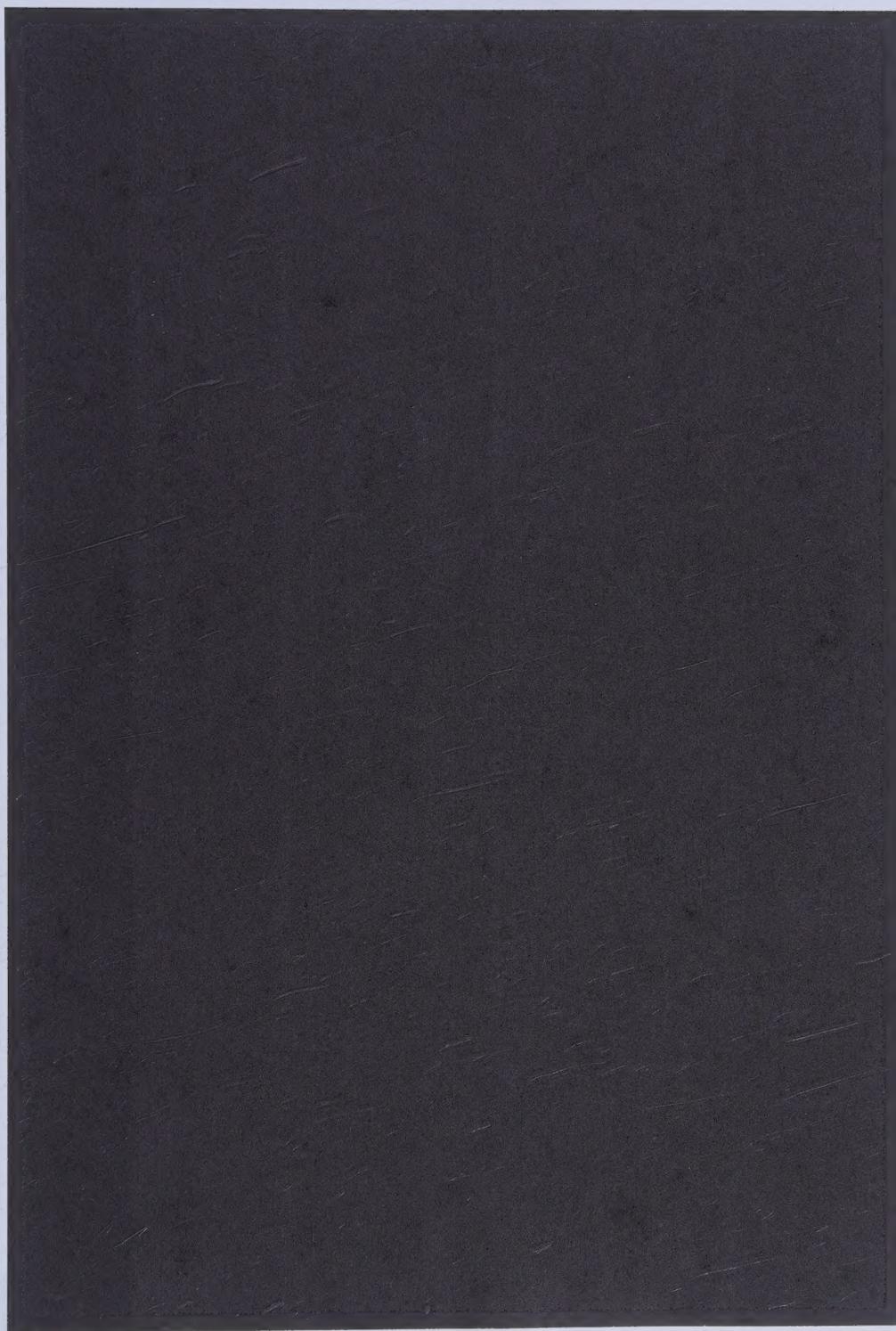
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